

December
1994

INTERREGNUM

#9

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fantasy roleplaying and more

INTERREGNUM

#9

*An Amateur Press Association
covering fantasy roleplaying games
and anything that interests those who play them.*

Peter Maranci, ed.

Topic: "Resurrection"

December 1994

Interregnum is an Amateur Press Association, comprised of zines written by individual contributors and mailed to the editor. It is collated and published approximately twelve times per year. **New contributors and subscribers are always welcome.**

A subscription normally costs \$2.00 per issue plus the actual cost of the selected method of mailing (see FAQ for more details). Subscribers may open an account from which these costs are deducted by mailing a check or money order in US funds, payable to Peter Maranci, at the following address:

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Since **Interregnum** is an amateur production, it is necessary for contributors to help cover the costs of production: \$2 per single-sided master page mailed in. Alternatively, contributors may mail 200 good double-sided copies of their zine to the editor. The only additional cost to contributors is the price of the postage to mail their issue to them.

All zines sent in for publication in **Interregnum** should be copyrighted by the author. Copyright may be asserted by the use of the following phrase:

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Sample issues of **Interregnum** are available at \$3 each for US and foreign/overseas addresses.

Many trademarked products are discussed in **Interregnum**. No challenge to the holders of these trademarks is intended.

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PUBLICATION SCHEDULE:

⇒ The deadline for inclusion in **Interregnum #10** has been pushed back to January 19th. Zines for **Interregnum #11** must arrive by February 16th.

⇒ The topic for **Interregnum #10** is **Burn out**. We've all experienced it; why does it happen, and what do you do about it?

→Pete

*I*t's cold outside here in Malden, and it's probably cold almost everywhere Interregnum is read; though a few subscribers live down in the southern US, most issues are sent to cold climes. Contributors should remember that a good way to avoid frostbite without expensive heating bills is to engage in strenuous exercise—such as typing away like mad on your next zine. ☺

Church and State

I may not have made this sufficiently clear in past issues, so I'd like to stress it now: my roles as editor and zine author are entirely separate. On the editorial page I speak ex cathedra; I will make every effort to be as impartial and fair-minded as possible.

In my zines, on the other hand, I'll use the same artistic freedom to be colorful and controversial that every other contributor has. There would be little point for me to write a zine if I had to inspect every word twice over for fear of giving offense, and I'll do no such thing. But that makes it imperative for me to make it absolutely clear that everything I write in *The Log That Flies* is entirely my own opinion, and does not represent Interregnum in any way.

Arisia '95

Arisia '95 will take place on January 13, 14, and 15 (Martin Luther King weekend). This year promises to be particularly interesting for roleplayers, as there are going to be a number of panels on subjects we've covered in past issues. I plan to be there, representing IR. I'll have a lot of promotional issues to distribute, and will be sitting in on a fanzine panel and perhaps a few others.

Of course the convention wouldn't be complete without an Interregnum party. I'm in the process of working out the details, to avoid conflicts with panels and major events; Sunday afternoon is a possibility, or possibly Saturday afternoon. A post-con party in Malden might also be arranged, if enough people survive the festivities; a chance to decompress after the con, watch a few videotapes and relax.

The details of the con party will be posted on the Arisia bulletin board. Contributors and readers are welcome to come and chat, munch out, and contribute to an "at the con" supplement for Interregnum #11.

Hello Goodbye

Promotional copies of Interregnum will no longer be available at Pandemonium Books in Harvard Square (in Cambridge, Massachusetts for far-flung readers). On the other hand, Your Move Games in Somerville MA is now carrying IR.

TANSTAAFL?

I'm sorry to say that regular distribution of promotional issues of Interregnum is going to have to be cut down in the future. It's great that so many game stores have been willing to distribute IR, and the friends in distant places who've helped out deserve a great deal of thanks; unfortunately the production of promotional issues is taking an incredible amount of work and money. It takes at least two weekend days of work to produce the copies, and the cost of paper, cover stock, and postage has become prohibitive. Just getting the boxes to the Post Office takes a week of lunch hours, with five minutes wasted each day getting through the metal detector!

I'll continue to distribute promotional copies locally for as long as possible. I'll also send the occasional box of copies to more distant locales (if the present distributors are willing), but these will be irregular.

The promotional issues have given IR a great deal of exposure; over 2,300 copies of Interregnum have

been distributed in the past year. That's a larger circulation than many APAs have in three years of publishing.

The Interregnum Sampler project is still on, however. Copies will be distributed at Arisia and at RuneQuest Con 2. Extra copies will be made up for future cons, too.

Slow Down (You Move Too Fast)

There's been considerable discussion about the publication frequency of Interregnum. I've been sticking to monthly publication as a point of pride, but there are several good reasons to reduce the frequency of IR.

Deadlines are one reason. Thus far we've managed to have a respectable page count for every issue; but it's always been a close thing, with some zines arriving at the very last minute. Less frequent publishing will give everyone time to get their zines in on time. Likewise, issues will probably be thicker with a slower publication schedule.

Less-frequent publication will also give contributors more time to work on comments on the previous issue.

A number of contributors have urged me to cut down on issue frequency, on the grounds that the monthly schedule doesn't give them time to get a zine together for every issue; I've noticed that a fair number of contributors appear only in alternate issues, or even more rarely. I can sympathize with the difficulty of keeping up with the conversation while missing half of the issues.

The final reason is time—my own. I enjoy publishing Interregnum very much indeed, but each issue is a lot of work—so much so that the work from one month is often not finished by the deadline for the next issue. I'm not the only one who has commented that it seems as if as soon as one issue is done, it's time for the next. It's like being stuck on a treadmill in high gear, and that is definitely not fun.

What to do? An assistant editor would help take a bit of the pressure off, but it wouldn't help contributors—and in any case no one's volunteering. I've always resisted the notion of going bi-monthly; a two-month hiatus between issues would make it difficult to carry on a thread of discussion, and six issues per year is simply not frequent enough to suit me. Also each issue would probably be 120 pages long or more!

I was stuck at that point for quite a while. Monthly publication was too rapid a pace, and bi-monthly too slow. No happy medium existed, since anything between the two would be irregular and not intuitively obvious.

I owe thanks to David Dunham, who in noting my dilemma said (and I'm paraphrasing here) "Who cares if it's irregular?" ☺

The logic was perfect. I can simply go through the calendar for the year, scheduling issues at whatever odd number of weeks works best. Interregnum can come out once every five weeks, in which case there will be about ten issues every year; or we can come out every six weeks, publishing nine issues per year. Either option should let authors keep the flow of dialog going while allowing enough time to get zines together without feeling too rushed.

So. Ideas? Opinions? I'd like some feedback. The IR Net list is one way to reach most IR zine authors, but I'd be glad to receive letters via snailmail, too. The decision doesn't have to be made in a hurry, but I'd like to hear from anyone with an opinion before making the switch.

Take care, all! Stay warm!

—>Pete

The Interregnum FAQsheet

Interregnum is a monthly Amateur Press Association comprised of individual zines written and formatted by various authors and mailed to the editor for collation, reproduction, and binding. The primary focus is roleplaying games, fantasy, and science fiction, but diversity is valued—authors may write about anything they wish. Interregnum is written by mature gamers who necessarily have other subjects of interest beyond roleplaying games. It is hoped that the inclusion of such subjects will produce interesting insights into the roleplaying hobby.

Subscriptions: There is no fixed subscription period. Subscribers should mail a check or money order in US funds payable to Peter Maranci to establish an account; as issues are mailed the cost of the issue and the postage used to mail it will be deducted from the account. When the account gets low the amount left will be noted on the mailing envelope. At that point the subscriber may send more money to continue receiving issues, put their account on hold until some future time, or have the balance returned (at the editor's option, a final issue may be mailed instead to close out accounts in which the balance is less than the cost of one issue).

The usual cost per issue is \$2 plus postage. Due to special circumstances the cost has been lowered to \$1 per issue plus postage. Please note that when and/or if the special deal lapses we will return to the original rate.

Postage: Within the US 1st class mail for the average issue of IR costs \$1.67, while book rate (4th class) costs \$1.05. Subscribers may choose which method of mailing they prefer. Overseas subscribers may choose any type of mail available from the US Postal Service; rates under \$2 exist. Warning: all rates may go up soon!

Sample Issues: Sample issues may be obtained by mailing a check or money order for \$3 if the issue is to be mailed within the United States. A sample issue mailed outside the US is \$4 in US funds.

Writing for Interregnum: Anyone is welcome to write for IR. Since Interregnum is an amateur publication, not for profit, contributors help defray the cost of photocopying their zines. The cost is normally \$2 per single-sided page. However, the special circumstances noted above have made it possible to reduce the cost to \$1 per page. Contributors are not charged for a copy of the issue they write in—their only additional cost is postage.

Alternatively contributors may mail in 200+ copies of their zine, printed double-sided to reduce mailing costs. Zines mailed via UPS or any other private delivery service should be sent "no signature required".

Format: Zines must be clean and sharp enough to photocopy well. Desktop publishing is not required: zines may be typed, or even handwritten. Margins should be at least 1/2 inch wide on the top, bottom, and outer edges; a one-inch margin should be used for the binding edge (the left side for odd-numbered pages, right side for even-numbered pages). Internal art enhances readability and is always appreciated, as are multiple columns and subheads.

Content: Contributors are free to write as they wish, almost totally free of editorial oversight. I ask only that nothing be included which could lead to legal difficulties; please keep in mind that Interregnum is shipped across state lines and overseas, and is distributed in game stores which are open to all ages.

Copyright: All zines should be copyrighted by the author. Copyright may be asserted through the following phrase: Copyright (Your Name) (Date) or © (Your Name) (Date). (c) is not a valid designation.

Copyrighted and trademarked material is often discussed in Interregnum. Discussion of such material is not intended as a challenge to any copyright or trademark.

Emailing Zines: Zines in ASCII form may be emailed to the editor via the InterNet for DTP formatting, or sent in on 3.5" or 5.25" DOS-compatible floppy disks. Since time is limited (and becomes tighter as collation looms), ASCII zines sent in for layout should arrive at least four days before the deadline for printed zines. I'll attempt to capture the style of the contributor, if I have a sample of previous work and enough time. I can also accept files created with Publish-It for DOS or Windows on 3.5 or 5.25" disks.

Emailed zines will be printed on a 300 dpi Okidata OL400c laser printer for no extra charge.

Special ASCII codes may be included in emailed text to allow my DTP program to automatically format elements of the zine. A guide to these codes is available for email contributors—email for info.

Letters to the Editor will be gladly received, and printed in the editorial section. No letter will be published, however, that is marked "not for publication".

Back Issues: Back issues are available while supplies last. Issues #1-3 cost \$2 each in US funds, plus the cost of postage. Subsequent issues are available at \$1 + postage. A considerable savings in postage costs may be realized by shipping several issues at once.

Distribution: A limited number of promotional copies of Interregnum are distributed at selected game stores, conventions, and other sites. If you're interested in distributing free copies of IR, please contact the editor.

Please note that as the number of distributors increases (and it has been doing so, steadily) the number of promotional copies available for each site will necessarily decrease. Furthermore, production of promotional copies may be reduced or eliminated without warning. Only paying subscribers can be sure to receive all issues of IR. Paying subscribers receive their issues weeks or even months in advance of promotional distribution. Finally, only paying subscribers will receive special mailings of bonus material, should any occur. In other words, the Editor strongly urges readers of the promotional copies to subscribe. ☺

Net Connection: An InterNet alias has been set up which allows correspondents to receive information and updates about the status of Interregnum. Anyone who would like to be on that list should send email to maranci@max.tiac.net and include a valid InterNet address.

Glossary:

RPG: Role Playing Game

IR: Interregnum. You're soaking in it.

TWH: The Wild Hunt, an old and respected APA based in the Greater Boston area. A number of Interregnum contributors have written for TWH.

A&E: Alarums & Excursions, a slightly older APA based on the West Coast, editor Lec Gold 3965 Alla Rd. LA, CA 90066

RQ: *RuneQuest*™, a roleplaying system played by a number of contributors to Interregnum.

AD&D™: *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*™, a roleplaying system

LARP or LRP: Live Action Role Playing (game); a generic term

PBEM: Play By Email

BTW: By The Way

GM, DM: Gamemaster, the person who runs the game

IMHO: In My Humble Opinion

RAEBNC: Read And Enjoyed But No Comment. An acronym commonly used by procrastinating contributors. 8^>}

CD-ROM: Compact Disk, Read Only Memory. Laser disks for computer which hold huge amounts of data. Many high-quality computer games are released on CD-ROM.

:) : a smile, indicating that the text preceding is not to be taken entirely seriously

8^>} : The cynical smile of a bearded, bespectacled editor

LOG THAT

#9

© Peter Maranci December 1994

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This is the easy part of winter; the holidays are upon us, and soon after Arisia will provide a high point for January. I'm not looking forward to February, though...

That has nothing to do with roleplaying—or does it? Is there a "season" for roleplaying? Do games follow any sort of regular pattern through the year? I don't know, but it seems an interesting question. Perhaps winter is the natural season of gaming, since there are few outdoor activities to compete with. Since everyone has to huddle inside anyway, it's possible that they spend that extra time gaming. Memory is no guide to the truth of that preposition, though.

In any case, my own game activity has been picking up lately. Which is the reason for an unofficial Log topic this month: the Wonder campaign.

I Wonder As I Wander

I've been documenting the formation of the Wonder campaign as a sort of unscientific case study. Recruitment of players has been odd, to say the least; nicely laid-out flyers drew no responses for months, while a few announcements on the Internet drew many new players.

Recent developments have been stranger yet. I finally did receive a response to a flyer—from California! It seems a gamer was visiting the Boston

area and saw my flyer in a game store. It interested him enough that he emailed and asked for info about the campaign even though he can't play.

He's not the first person who can't play but wants to be kept posted about the game. Six or seven people have emailed to express interest in reading about Wonder, from as far away as New Zealand. I can't explain the reaction, but plan to set up some sort of Wonder alias for those addresses if possible (separate from the main alias for players).



Following is *A Short Guide to Wonder*, a sort of miniature player handbook.

I'd decided not to bother with a campaign guide for two reasons: it was suggested (here?) that an overabundance of information could put

players off (which sounded reasonable), and I realized that a proper introduction to Wonder could be a very considerable writing project. Nonetheless, the questions of players over the Net made it clear that some sort of player's guide was necessary.

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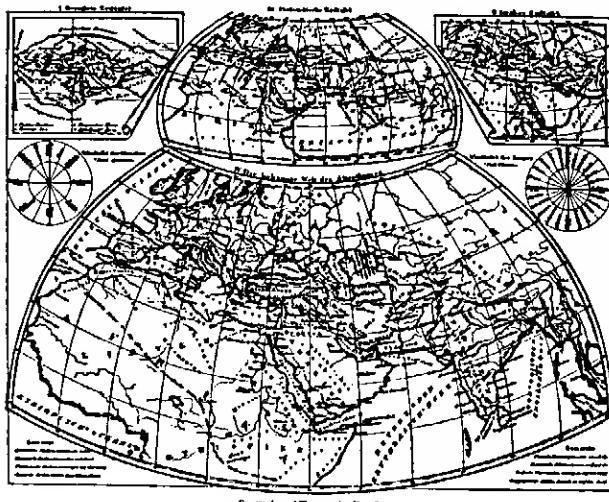
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A Short Guide to Wonder

Two principles are universal in Wonder.

One is that Wonder is broken up into many small regions. There are no unifying organizations or beliefs that cover wide areas; no religion, school of magic, nation, or philosophy may be found throughout the land. Wonder is Balkanized, though not necessarily in the war-torn pattern of Earth.

The other principle is that of variety. Throughout Wonder, things are different.



GEOGRAPHY:

Wonder is big—far too big to be known by any one person. Though at some places the “edge of the world” may be found, in many directions maps end in unexplored territory. Parts of the geography of Wonder change, as well; cloud cities sometimes move (at varying rates of speed), and even major earthbound areas can undergo surprising alterations.

The game begins with the characters in the north of central Wonder—not on the dark frozen mountains of the Deep North, but among cool steppes, within sight of less-forbidding mountain ranges.

There are places in Wonder which resemble the “fairy tales” of Earth. Lands where dreams come true, and metaphor can become reality. That quality may be found almost everywhere in Wonder, and is

not particularly remarked upon—a peasant returning from a hunting trip could tell his people that he’d encountered a talking tree and he wouldn’t necessarily be disbelieved. Some would likely doubt him, but not on the basis that trees cannot talk (though they might argue that it would be unlikely).

The Sky

The sky of Wonder includes stars, constellations, the planets, and the Moon—much as are seen on Earth. However, travel to these bodies is possible, and may sometimes take place suddenly and unexpectedly. Astronomical distances are not necessarily equivalent to Earth measurements. In general, the night sky of Wonder is more dramatic than that of Earth—astronomical bodies are larger-seeming and more detailed. Strangely-colored mists and shapes may sometimes be seen among the stars.

There are legends of cloud cities that may be reached in strange ways—by climbing rainbows or low-lying clouds, for example. However, rainbows and clouds are rarely solid. Few people bother to make the attempt to climb them, in any case; the realms of the sky are said to be beautiful, but not necessarily without danger.

Beyond the Sky

Even stranger worlds lie beyond the sky. These are virtually unreachable for most who dwell in Wonder; only strange magics and rare portals give access to them, though there are legends that some may be reached by sailing off the edge of the world. These worlds are sometimes used by sorcerers as a source of strange and magical servitors.

The Underworld

The Underworld lies beneath all of Wonder, as far as anyone knows. The dead are often drawn there, either in spirit or in body; they find ways down into the dark that mortals cannot see. Some say it is possible for mortals to travel to the Underworld if they are lucky and strong enough. Returning, however, can be much more difficult.

The Underworld is said to be dark, vast, and for the most part terrifying. Stories tell of huge deserts of black sand in which nameless horrors burrow, and unending oceans filled with monsters, on which sailors and ships drowned at sea sail forever. Yet there are also said to be places of cheer and warmth.

Oceans, Seas, and Rivers

There are many bodies of water in Wonder, large and small. Central Wonder, however, is somewhat distant from the larger oceans. The closest is the Brizz't Sea, to the east.

SOCIETIES:

Wonder lacks the sort of large, organized societies that produce maps and Imperial Surveys—or at least, characters are unaware of such. Likewise, long-distance communication has not been highly developed or organized to a great extent (as far as characters know, in any case). Many of the inhabitants of Wonder know little of the world beyond walking distance other than from old wives' tales, books, and (in rare instances) dreams. Though dreams can lie.

There are many places where people live together in Wonder, from tiny villages to large city-

states—but villages are much more common in central Wonder. Most societies are family- or clan-based, and many groups exist in relative isolation from each other.

Traders and caravans travel across Wonder, carrying strange goods and stranger stories. These are generally welcomed, though there are exceptions.

RACES OF WONDER:

The concept of race is not alien to Wonder, but it is not very meaningful, either. The "human" race is widely variegated; there are "men" with tails, with horns, with strange-colored skin...these might be viewed with curiosity and fear in some cases, but not to the extent of violence...usually

There are completely non-human races, but these do not mix with humans on a daily basis. Among some rumored species are a race of giant talking spiders, centaurs, the Wild Folk who live in swamps and the isolated places of the world, the Brownies that no one sees, the Gnoles whose houses are deep under trees in dark woods...there are many stories

about strange creatures.

Because Wonder is so large and communication is so poor, most groups have little knowledge of other species.

Fabulous monsters exist in Wonder, too: many of the creatures of classical mythology, for example. These are not always as depicted in legend, however.

MAGIC:

Magic is everywhere in Wonder, but it is not common.



That's not a contradiction; magic is manifest in much of nature, and many of the inhabitants of Wonder are touched in some way by it. But there is no standard type of magic, no catalog of spells; in fact, magic rarely comes in the form of spells at all. Wizards, Sorcerers, Enchanters, Summoners, and other kinds of magicians all exist, but the magic they practice varies from town to town and region to region.

Enchanted items are not rare in Wonder, but they are often the product of long and difficult toil. As with spells, enchanted objects are wildly varied; a certain principle of randomness seems to apply, and magical items may sometimes have whimsical or picayune qualities.

Magic of all kinds tends to be marked with character and personality. For example, two wands might both produce fire, but one would emit streams of blue flame, while another might make a high-pitched whining noise and cause disks of red fire to emerge from the ground. How they work, how often they may be used, the side effects if any, and all other qualities are generally unique to each item.

Magic items are often passed down within a family as heirlooms. A widow might bequeath her oldest son a magic boat, for example.

In mortals, magic generally manifests itself in special skills and abilities. A man might be unusually strong, for example, or have a perfect sense of direction. He might be gifted to make rope of a beautiful shimmering silver color (using secret, special ingredients). Or he might not have any noticeable ability at all. Not everyone does. Some do attempt to specialize in magic, but this is a difficult thing to do; most mages are not interested in taking an apprentice, and there is no commonly available body of knowledge about magic. Much of magic is a matter of personal ability in any case.

The scientific method is not widely known and practiced in central Wonder. Magic is accepted as magic, and therefore unknowable, by most.



DREAMING:

The one type of magic available to anyone in Wonder is Dreaming. This is a deceptively simple sort of magic: the dreamer attempts to place their mind into an appropriate condition, performs some ritual if they wish (these can vary), and sleeps. Sleeping, they dream of a thing they desire. Waking, they may find their Dream—or not, since dreams can easily fail.

Dream-objects have strange properties. Usually they last only for a short time—a few hours, days, or weeks. Sometimes an object can apparently be made permanent, but this is usually an accident; to Dream such an object seems to drain the uninitiated dreamer of a basic life force which can never be restored. Many who dwell in Wonder never dare to deliberately Dream.

Common natural objects are the easiest things to Dream. Rare and precious objects are more difficult, and their existence is more tenuous and brief. Magic items and living things are most rare and difficult of all.

Dreams are not always voluntary, but spontaneous Dreams are rare.

There are some who believe that a Dream object in some way partakes of the soul of its Dreamer—an old legend tells of a man who could not be slain except by the sword that he himself had Dreamed as a child.

Visions

Since a Dream can take the spirit of the sleeping throughout Wonder, it is possible to Dream visions, both real and false ones. Dreaming spirits can be unseen, or have the appearance of their mortal bodies; other effects may exist as well.

Failure

Dreams can fail. If a dreamer does not wake naturally of themselves, the Dream is likely to fail or be flawed in some way. Dreams can also go wrong even if the dreamer is not prematurely woken. There are many ways in which a dream can go wrong.

A failed dream can produce an insubstantial image of the thing desired, fading swiftly or slowly as the case may be. A dream object may turn out to be flawed, or to have strange and disconcerting properties. A Nightmare may produce objects or scenes of terror and death. And there are many other ways in which a dream may fail. The most common, of course, is to have no effect at all.

Dreamers

Some rare individuals become Dreamers, dedicating their lives to oneiromancy. These are strange and reclusive mages; among their abilities is said to be the power to sleep for exactly as long as they choose, completing a Dream in exactly the time desired.

RELIGION:

Religion takes many forms. Some gods are known to travel in mortal form in the world; these garner worshippers or not, as their nature dictates. Most gods are not immensely powerful, however.

They may heal the sick, kill groups of mortals, encourage fertility in a local area, and create other minor miracles, but these actions must generally be performed in person. Gods have power, but they are subject to limitations. Some believe that mortals can become gods, though the mechanism of deification is not common knowledge.

“Demons” as such are not known in Wonder. But there are many strange creatures that roam the world, from the Underworld, the worlds in and beyond the sky, and even from odd corners of Wonder itself.

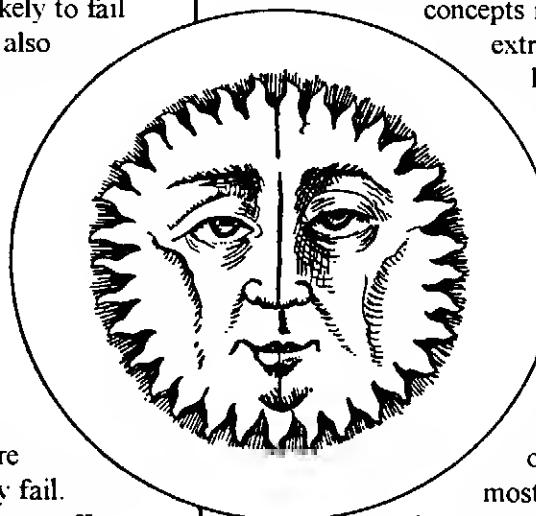
Philosophical principles are also worshipped by some in Wonder. These may or may not be personified as actual entities. They tend to be hugely powerful in theory, but effectively unreachable by mortals. The concepts involved are often extremely complex, requiring a lifetime of study to understand. Such “principles” perform no visible actions, and are of little use to most mortals. That the prayers of the monks on V’lish Mountain to Dread Hish keep the Circle of Time moving at the appointed speed is of little interest to most—and it would be impossible to prove that the prayers had any real effect, or that Dread Hish existed.

No religion is widespread across Wonder.

* * *

A few points about the campaign:

- 1) Expect the unexpected.
- 2) The stereotypes of standard fantasy gaming will be avoided as much as possible.
- 3) Atmosphere and mystery are the key elements of Wonder.
- 4) The most important point is to have fun.





DECEMBER THEME: Resurrection

Few of my characters have been resurrected.

That's not because I've played with particularly tough gamemasters, though. It's simply that my initial (A)D&D roleplaying was comparatively brief. I didn't have the time to have characters brought back to life (though since my first GM was probably the ultimate character killer, I've probably had as many characters *die* as most other players).

Since the vast majority of my gaming experience has been with systems that have a strong emphasis on realism, resurrection has almost never been a possibility.

In one instance however I recall taking an unusual slant: focussing on the horror of resurrection. That character, an atheistic Mostali (RuneQuest dwarf), was driven somewhat insane by the inherent contradiction of his personal experience of rebirth and his fundamental belief that personal identity could not continue after death. It was fun, though it never really went anywhere.

Dying is a pretty big thing. It seems strange that so many characters die and come back to life without being seriously changed. Some games (and gamemasters) do make permanent changes in a revived character (most commonly with a reduction

in Constitution or the equivalent), but psychologically the matter is generally ignored.

That doesn't make sense. It seems obvious that dying would involve some sort of "death trauma"; after all, it would probably be the most momentous event in the character's life! Likewise, wouldn't it be interesting if as part of the process of resurrection a character experienced a "rebirth trauma"? I've never heard of such a thing, though I'm sure *some* gamemaster out there must have tried it...



A TRADE

Readers of previous IRs may recall that we've had trouble with Factsheet 5, a large reviewzine; specifically, that they printed a review of IR without giving it anything more than a "quick skim" (as was confessed by their science fiction staff writer). That staff writer had promised to read and review IR properly for the next issue of Factsheet 5 (he didn't, as it happens).

While looking though the alt.zines newsgroup on the Internet, I read a thread in which a zine writer complained that the chief editor of FS5 had not read his zine before "reviewing" it. The writer was bitterly attacked for his plaint. No one can accuse me of not being quixotic; I couldn't help but post a low-key

followup stating that the chief editor did in fact review some zines without reading them. Though I noted that I had confirmation from a knowledgeable source on that point, I explicitly failed to identify the source to protect confidentiality.

It's bewildering how many people have a knee-jerk reaction to defend putative authority (and why do such defenses so often take the same form, no matter what the subject?). The attacks came fast and furious. One of the most virulent and surprising was from the science-fiction staff writer himself—the very person who'd *told* me the reviews were spurious!

That was more than I could take, and so I replied with the text of his own original confession to me. His reply was intensely personal, and didn't respond to my point at all: among his remarks was the statement that Factsheet 5 would not review Interregnum (which is ironic, since the magazine awards the most adulation to "in your face" zines that expose hypocrisy and BS—apparently they can dish it out, but they can't take it).

The science fiction reviewer's repeated personal attacks annoyed me to the point where I announced that I'd be posting a monthly repeat of Factsheet 5's "review" methods, and an anti-FS5 tirade in IR (that last inspired by the fact that the entire thread had been started by another author's similar tirade). My purpose was to annoy FS5 as much as possible. I was mad as hell.

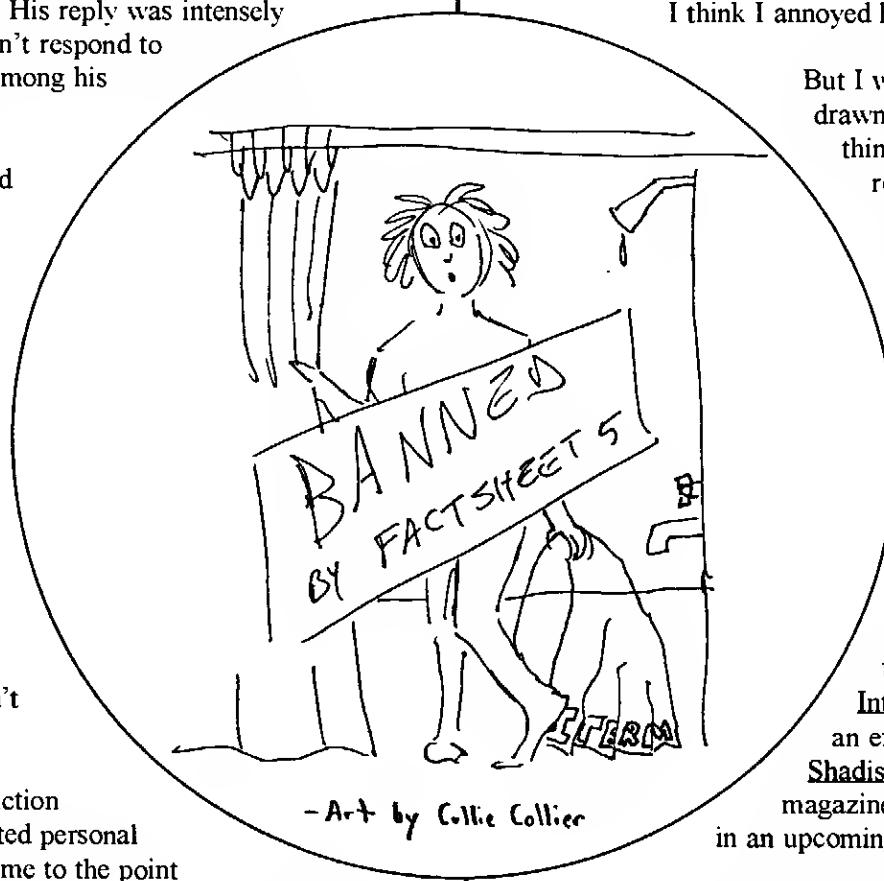
There's not much point in posting the info to the Net, as it happens. It seems that most "alternative" press people are nonetheless quite loyal to authority, and only a fool spits against a wind—even if the wind is wrong. I won't waste my time tilting against a windmill. As for the tirade, this is it: not as venomous I'd first planned, but after all who really cares? Factsheet 5 caters more to the music and unusual sex crowd, and while those groups overlap with roleplayers to some extent there are only a few RPG magazines reviewed in FS5. They're not a loss.

It's ironic, though, that the science fiction reviewer later announced that Interregnum was "an otherwise fine RPG and science fiction APA"—otherwise, that is, except for me.

I think I annoyed him. Good! 8^>}

But I won't let myself be drawn into this sort of thing again; while re-reading the autobiography of Isaac Asimov recently I was surprised to see that he'd had much the same problem once. I'll profit by Asimov's experience.

The situation is also easier to take since Interregnum received an excellent review from Shadis roleplaying magazine, which will appear in an upcoming issue.



ARISIA PANELS

Arisia '95 will have a greater emphasis on roleplaying than in previous years. The panels in particular look extremely interesting; many of the topics have been covered in Interregnum and in the last few years of The Wild Hunt. Here's a list.

Gaming Track Panel Schedule

FRIDAY

8pm: Advice To New Role Players: What You Need To Know

9:30 pm: What Shall We Play Now? New Games.

SATURDAY

10am: Publishing Fanzines

11am: Problem Players ... Troublesome PCs: What Is A GM To Do?

12pm: Magic: The Addiction

1pm: GM HelpLine

2pm: GM HelpLine (cont.)

3pm: Gaming On The Electronic Frontier: Play-By-Email And On-line Freeform Roleplaying

4pm: Tabletop Versus LARP: Where Is The Line? Only The GM Knows For Sure.

5:30pm: What's New At White Wolf?

8pm: Crafting Original Game Worlds: A Beginners Guide

10pm: As We Grow Up: Adult Situations In Role Playing

SUNDAY

11am: Long Term Campaigns: How To Avoid GM Burnout

12pm: Role Playing As An Educational Tool

1pm: Game Writeups As Story Fodder: Good Idea, Bad Idea, Too Private A Joke?

2pm: GURPS: Does It Live Up To Its Promise?

3pm: Is Gaming A Man's World?



COMMENTS ON IR #8:

David Hoberman: I suspect that we disagree on the definition of art. Still, I see your point.

"(to) ...bring something away from a game... is more difficult, more hidden and in the end, a personal process." I immediately thought of some modern art I've seen, which makes even the more abstract roleplaying I've witnessed seem meaningful and clear as day.

Gil Pili: Jumping the gun, eh Gil? Your article on resurrection was very interesting indeed. I liked the "Crude Example" very much.

• I'm sorry to hear that Stargate and The Puppetmasters were so disappointing—it seems that despite all the progress there's been in the last couple of decades, Hollywood *still* doesn't understand science fiction. A pity.

On the bright side, at least television seems to be getting the idea. Babylon 5 has been quite good, and has already remained on the air longer than most quality science-fiction TV shows (Max Headroom and The Prisoner come to mind). Not that bad shows aren't still possible. Stuff like Time Traxx, Space Precinct,

and M.A.N.T.I.S. proves that the old style of science fiction television may never be entirely banished from the small screen.

● Speaking of one-shots—years ago I created a one-shot science fiction scenario, and ran it several times. I had elaborate maps, and the whole thing was rather thoroughly written up; one of the most complete scenarios I've ever written. The players seemed to enjoy it a lot. Needless to say, the materials are all lost somewhere... I have little hope of finding it again, and can't remember much of the details. Pity, because I could have published it here...

Dale Meier: The mini-scenarios look like a lot of fun—it's too bad I can't run a game of Pendragon to try them out. I was particularly amused by the "bad monk".

● Regarding the new Star Wars™ magazine from West End Games: I picked up the Star Wars™ RPG system some years ago. It was very disappointing: so poorly written and designed, and so reticent with information as to be ridiculous. How could they fail to publish stats for the movie characters in the hard-bound edition? It made no sense.

However, I recently saw the entire Star Wars™ series again. It is a fascinating background... I found myself wanting to play in it. I don't suppose I ever will, but perhaps if there's a one-shot available some time I'll give it a try. I have to wonder if the game manages to capture the essential "flavor" of the movies, though.

Doug Jorenby:
Does poetry require discipline, Doug? I hadn't realized. ☺

● The "orphans' Thanksgiving" sounds very comforting. I've done that sort of thing a few times; with any quantity of people I usually end up too busy with the cooking to enjoy myself.

Reading about the food at your games made me hungry. But then, almost *everything* makes me hungry... which is why I'm the size I am. ☺

George Phillies: I suspect that by "modern standards" almost every woman in the world has a figure that's "undefined" or lacking in one way or another. There are times when watching television that I realize that if I were a woman, I'd feel under attack from the entire world. As a man, I don't really have to worry—though I note that television insists on relegating men of my general appearance to comic roles, "heavy" roles, or flying through the air with livestock and giving away presents. ☺

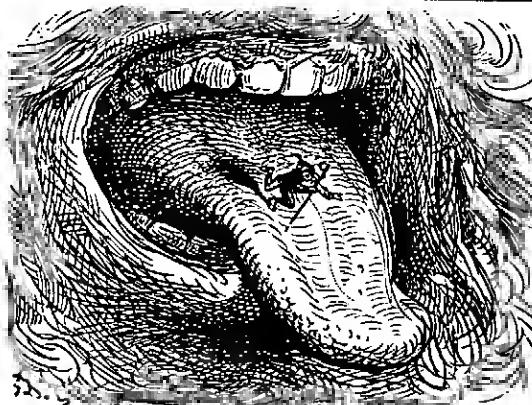
● No Tears for a Princess continues to be very enjoyable and interesting—it's exactly the sort of modern fantasy that I like best.

Curtis Taylor: Thanks for the RuneQuest information. I may not play the system any more, but I like to keep in touch just in case things change.

● It's interesting that you should mention Dream Park, Curtis: as it happens, the first book in the series inspired the formation of the real-world International Fantasy Gaming Society™ (IFGS), and a *real* "Dream Park™" corporation. I believe that SSI-type games preceded the publication of the book, and of course the SCA has been fighting live combat for some time; there were also quite a few gaming groups who acted out their games long before the book. However Niven *et alia* could make a claim to have set the pattern for live-combat roleplaying games of a certain type.

The SoloQuest is *great*, Curtis! I'm tempted to write one myself. Do you know if the format is copyrighted?

Virgil Greene: It's interesting that you're the only one who mentioned bards in connection with



roleplaying; in retrospect it seems an obvious point to make.

Is TWERPS still in print?

I like the idea of reviewing old books; naturally, since I've been doing it myself for some time. I look forward to seeing more reviews of that sort.

Your reviews of roleplaying cartoons are generally on-target in my book. Perhaps you should review old RPG comics, too? There are a lot of interesting old ones, as I recall: *Wormy, Fineous Fingers*, an absolutely hysterical parody of Star Wars™ called "The Good Guys" (I think) which appeared in *The Space Gamer* long ago...it's a pity that most of these are totally unavailable. Even I don't have them. ☺

David Dunham: Childbirth...a very unusual subject for a game, and one I've not dealt with. Interesting. I was always under the impression that in Glorantha there were battle magic spells to avoid conception. Barring that, I assumed that an Uleria cultist could always do something. An "abort" spell, perhaps...though possibly a carefully placed Disruption could accomplish the same effect.

Jeeze. How gross. Sorry about that. I don't know what came over me. ☺

Bob Butler:

"The efforts of even the most veteran GM are not going to significantly impact the Halls of Academia". You're probably right, but I wouldn't rule out the possibility absolutely.

Uh oh...out of time...I'll have to continue this nextish...

GUEST AGAIN

Once again Rich Staats comes to the rescue—this time with another hysterical scenario for "It Came From the Late Late (Late?) Show", directly following this page.

LASER AT LAST

Yup, I finally broke down and bought a laser printer—an Okidata OL400e. It's a basic model, printing 4 pages per minute at 300 dots per inch; but compared to the old dot matrix, it's a wonder. And at \$325, it was a bargain.

I'll be printing future mailed zines on it at no extra charge from now on.

NEXT ISSUE

Reviews, more on Wonder...there are always articles which get pushed back again and again...anything's possible.



→Pete

COLOPHON

The Log That Flies #9 was gestated in a *P. Maranci 30.8 brain*. Much of the text was then written with *PC-Write 2.5*, an ancient but serviceable ~~villain~~ word processor.

The text was formatted for desktop publication using *Publish-It 4.0 for Windows*, a cranky but cheap DTP program.

The DTPcd document was printed on an Okidata OL400c 300 dpi laser printer—at last!

Most of the art in *TLTF* is taken from books of copyright-free clipart published by the *Dover Publishing Co.* of Mineola, NY. Reviews of various Dover books may be printed in future issues.

The art was copied on a *Kodak 2110* high-speed duplicator.

The author is not responsible for headaches caused by eyestrain ☺

→Pete

The Adventures of the UGSS Beryl #311 "The Dread Splorkoid Sonic Vacuum Disruptor"

The story to date . . . as you remember, our intrepid adventurers are members of the crew of the UGSS Beryl with an unending mission to explore the frontiers of space, discovering strange new life forms and civilizations and destroy them! The UGSS Beryl was on a routine expedition of the Plensars sector when it detected strange emissions from the Tarmalon system. The group contacted UGSHQ at Frandor immediately. The UGSHQ directed the UGSS Beryl to investigate but to proceed with extreme caution as the Tarmalon system was a suspected Splorkoid stronghold.

The UGSS Beryl and crew made way for the Tarmalon system with all haste. The current episode begins when Tharn, the science officer, begins scanning the star system.

Persona Dramatis

Captain of the UGSS Beryl, Thomas Jefferson Cha: Tom is the leader of the expedition. He is known as a demanding but fair leader. Tom is noted for his extreme punctuality; nothing irritates Tom more than someone or something being late. He is extremely generous and quite heroic --- melodramatic would be a mild description. Tom comes from a long line of explorers. In fact, he was born in the gravity well of a black hole. Captain Cha was raised on Arivus. Thomas is quite well educated; he is both a successful adventure novelist and a doctor of divinity for the Church of Light and Universal Tolerance of Sentients (CLUTS). Tom won a scholarship to the UGS Space Academy based on his writing skills. Tom joined the UGS Space Service (UGSSS) for adventure and material for his writing.

Science Officer of the UGSS Beryl, Tharn [*True name unpronounceable*]: Tharn is a radically symmetric plant like creature with limited ambulatory capabilities, but he has the capability to communicate with sentient creatures using a form of semi-telepathy and can move objects weighing up to five pounds with a form of telekinesis (the TK is of limited range though). Tharn is from the planet Thagan. Thagan is in a quintinary system (five stars); so, Tharn along with his entire race is both very resistant to radiation of all types and able to see across a huge band of the E-M spectrum . Tharn has a specially constructed wagon which he uses for excursions outside the ship; the wagon must be pulled by another crew member. Tharn has an exotic allergy to broccolium gas. Tharn joined UGSSS for the thrill of learning about new planets and species.

Chief Historian, Massalla Wa'cla`cla: Sal is from Earth originally. Sal's family was part of an ill fated expedition to the gamma-beta-aleph sector. The group crash landed on an artificial world where the whole expedition was captured and subjected to horrid experiments by the native life forms. Sal awoke on Earth, apparently aged thirteen years with a bionic left leg and a strange, aquamarine birthmark on his left arm. He also found he had a photographic memory. Sal was curious if others had had experiences similar to his own. Sal proved to be an excellent historian and eventually ended up an

influential advisor to the Leather Queen, Chief Matriarch, of Earth. An unfortunate incident involving a maid required Sal to depart with all haste from the royal quarters; his hobby of building and flying helicopters came in extremely handy at this point! Sal's friends describe him as slightly aloof and patient. Others would point out that Sal is always late. Sal joined UGSSS to escape execution.

Space Weapons Officer, Qwerty [*True name unpronounceable*]: Qwerty is an insectoid creature from the planet Mozariq; the Mozarians are quadropedal and use the front two claws for manipulative actions. The Mozarians have a hive culture, and all members of the hive serve the will of the Queen. Qwerty was always a little of a non-conformist and frequently displeased Her Eminence in his local hive. One day though Qwerty went too far, and the Queen decided to "retaliate" by sending Qwerty on a very dangerous mission. Qwerty was grievously injured, but "luckily" the medics at the hive were able to save his life. The Queen informed Qwerty that he was very fortunate, because a large portion of his brain was damaged in the attack. The local medical cresh had developed an artificial brain to take over certain of Qwerty's higher functions. It is a large dome spaced piece of metal which constantly hums and clicks, and it has numerous lights which flash on and off in random patterns. Qwerty found he had "lost" most of his emotional capabilities, but his ability to solve logical problems increased tenfold. The only joy for Qwerty after the "operation" was serving the will of the Queen. Unfortunately, the last thing the Queen did was to go on a hunting trip with Qwerty. The Queen was killed, but the last instructions Qwerty's "brain" received was to enjoy the use of weapons. Qwerty was exonerated for the Queen's death, but he found himself unable to function in normal society. Qwerty truly "enjoys" his work with the ship's weapons systems and frequently (far too often for any sane person) volunteers for combat missions. Qwerty joined the UGSSS for the chance to work as a unit with heavy weapons. Qwerty longs for the day when he can merge his consciousness with a weapon of mass destruction.

Engineering Officer, Slurp [*True name unpronounceable*]: Slurp is a bipedal reptilian creature from the planet Ignitz. Ignitz is hot and dry with a slightly higher gravity than Earth; so, Slurp is very strong for his size [*able to pick up Styrofoam rocks nearly as large as he is*]. Slurp was born in the Temple of Ignitzian Supremacy. Slurp is committed to the ideal that all non-Ignitzians are inferior, and he is more than willing to arm wrestle anyone to prove he is right! Slurp had a bad experience as a child. His first love was with the agricultural director of the local tribe, but later he made two horrific discoveries. First, she was an android, and second, even at that she had been unfaithful! After that Slurp became the bitterest lizard on two legs! Slurp is described by his friends as argumentative and tactless, and those who aren't friendly toward Slurp have rarely lived long enough to say anything! Slurp takes great joy in carving his sigil in any new place he visits or enemy he fells. Slurp joined the UGSSS for the joy of destroying life in all its variegated forms.

Items of Note

The UGS and the Splorkoids have been in a state of perpetual war since their first mutual encounter some 150 years ago. The Splorkoids are a feline, bipedal race with two heads (oddly, one head is always slightly off center on the torso and seems incapable of action!) The Splorkoids fly in large "saucers" which appear to be two paper plates covered in tin foil. The Splorkoids have very woolly bodies, frequently not matching the fur on their heads, and human hands; although some very evil Splorkoid leaders wear black leather gloves. The Splorkoids are noted for opposing goodness and UGS plans at every turn and no adventure of the UGSS Beryl would be complete without a Splorkoid fight scene.

The UGSS Beryl contains a fully sentient creature named Pops. Pops was installed on Thagan and thus contains many directives on peace, co-existence, ad nauseam. Pops has no love of combat (might damage the ship!) and will always attempt to talk the crew out of any plan involving weapons firing or even more urgently any plan involving enemies firing at Pops. None the less, the UGSS Beryl is fully equipped for its mission! It has lasers, missiles and shields. The UGSS Beryl's most devastating device is the experimental "nuclear beam." Everyone knows that anything nuclear is both dangerous and incredibly powerful, much more so than either fission or fusion! The crew generally only uses the nuclear beam only once per episode (for cost reasons), and the beam almost always completely destroys whatever menace is threatening the crew (unless the menace is slated to appear in a later episode).



Dans L'Attente D'Un Miracle

I suppose there's something harmonious in considering resurrection as the suggested topic for the December issue of *Interregnum*. After all, for us Northern Hemisphere types, it's when we hit the winter equinox and begin the slow return to longer daylight hours. Even though there's precious little evidence of it in Wisconsin (in fact, we've hardly seen the worst of the snow or cold by the time of Solstice), we're moving inexorably towards the rebirth of spring. Perhaps that's one of the keys to surviving in an allegedly temperate climate: to know that change is on the way even when there is no visible evidence.

As far as resurrection in the literal sense, I never had much use for it in role playing games. For many of the genera I enjoy (1930s pulp, modern horror, near-future, Victorian era), it's simply not an option. Resurrection was restricted to two general settings: fantasy (via magic) or high-tech science fiction (via some sort of batsscience indistinguishable from magic). Even given batsscience technology, resurrection seemed less of an issue in the sf setting. *Space Opera* had an incredible degree of medical technology, but couldn't regenerate neural tissue in the cerebral cortex. For some reason, characters in that universe seemed to make a point of head-shooting those who were otherwise "dead." Advanced medicine isn't likely to be of much use when you've been disintegrated by a phaser or splattered into radioactive goo by a plasma rifle. Cloning has some elements of an end run around this, but given the need to continuously update memory storage, its utility is limited.

Functionally, then, resurrection is an issue primarily of the fantasy setting. When I first started gaming, fantasy was the only genre available. I accepted as a matter of course that if the rules said player characters could be resurrected, then they certainly could. In the original rules to M.A.R. Barker's *Empire of the Petal Throne*, it said that only a small portion of the deceased's body was necessary to effect resurrection. This, of course, inspired no end of adolescent glee and ribaldry as it was decided *what* portion of the corpse would be returned to the temple. As I think back, resurrection wasn't used all that often in the early years of my RPG campaigns, largely because most of the characters were too poor and of too low a level to take advantage of it.

By the time I moved on to designing a fantasy world from scratch with the *Chivalry & Sorcery* rules, I felt a lot more confident about throwing out things I didn't like (and designing patches for material I thought was missing). I had decided that while the campaign would

Confounding: I wonder to what extent campaign power is confounded with the use of resurrection? I can't think of an example of a low-power game where resurrection occurs.



have clear fantasy elements, I wanted to adhere to a design path that was closer to historical feudalism. That meant resurrection was one of the first things to go. It helped that C&S took a more low-power view of world design. Gone were EPT's ubiquitous "Akbar & Jeff's Resurrection Huts"; the only persons capable of performing resurrections in C&S were full bishops of the church, and Their Lordships were unlikely to take much notice of most adventurers. From the get-go, the players knew that character death was the final verdict, with no further court of appeal.

The longer I played this way, the more I came to enjoy it. The players began to realize that they were "playing for keeps," as it were. The consequences of character actions were very important, and when someone put her or his character at extreme risk, it made quite an impression. Moreover, it kept the society more in line with the historical model I fancied. I don't recall pondering the sociological ramifications of a society where resurrection was a less than miraculous thing at the time, but the implication was clear. [Several years later I read Steve Brust's *Jhereg*, about a society where resurrection *was* commonplace, and didn't find it much to my liking.] I guess that it ultimately comes down to the type of stories one wants to tell. From my perspective, having characters shout, "Death, where is thy sting?", would remove much of the dramatic tension. I watched *The Maltese Falcon* for the umpteenth time last night, and was struck by Bogart's monologue to Mary Astor near the end of the film. "When a man's partner is killed," he explains, referring to the slain Miles Archer, "he's supposed to *do* something." Try to imagine the story if Spade had been able to cart Archer off to Akbar & Jeff's for a quick resurrection. "Oh, by the way, Sam....it was the woman who shot me. I don't think we want to keep her as a client." It would be the equivalent of shooting the horses drawing the *Stagecoach* in John Ford's movie of the same name -- there wouldn't be any movie.

Of course, there are other stories to be told besides oaters or Dashiell Hammett's gritty detective sagas. I imagine that one could set compelling stories in a culture where death is little more than a passing annoyance (and perhaps for some readers, Brust has done just that). I can't help but wonder what impact the experience of death and resurrection would have on the psyche of an individual. Otto Rank, the Italian psychoanalyst, believed that the birth trauma was the model for all subsequent fears and suffering in life, that we never suffered anything worse during our lifespan. What if we passed through the process of death, only to be returned to the living again (and perhaps again)? What sort of an impact would that have? Would the individual develop a

retrograde amnesia, as often results from serious injuries? Or would memories of death and what followed it be experienced as intrusive flashback memories, leaving the person increasingly fearful and confused? What if someone was returned to life against their will? Obviously, there are no real answers to these speculations, but they make for some interesting thoughts that are seldom considered within the context of games that allow for resurrection.



Just to prove that actions speak louder than words, I did break my moratorium on resurrection once. In the *C&S* campaign I described above, the leading character was killed by a freak critical hit about two years in to a campaign that ran continuously for three years. If I had it all to do over again, I would have fudged the result to a mortal wound, giving the other characters a chance to save him. At the time, though, I firmly believed that what the dice said, happened. Boom! The hero was dead, and that was that. The players were all stunned, and it quickly became obvious that they had little interest in continuing without this key individual. In order to keep the game going, I was forced (by my own prior decisions) to come up with a mechanism to resurrect the slain leader. It was an opportunity for some good role playing, involving an alien culture that used blood magic in a horrific ritual to recall this fellow from beyond the pale, and I think the players were a bit sobered by how many victims died to return their friend to the ranks of the living. With the benefit of hindsight, I would do things very differently. Perhaps that's the equivalent of resurrection for gaming, though: you don't get "do-overs."

Depending on your philosophical perspective, there may be more interesting options. I was always intrigued by the karmic systems in Asian game settings such as *Bushido* and *Land of the Rising Sun*. When the culture believes in reincarnation or the transmigration of souls, death is simply a transient stage, and the manner of a character's death is crucial. There was never enough interest among the people I played with to run a game in an Asian setting long enough for that to become an issue, but the possibilities remain tantalizing. What about the character who died in the grip of an extreme passion and chose not to follow one of the paths of the dead, but to remain behind as a *gaki* or *goryo*? Since either state was likely to involve the former character's comrades, you have the possibility of an on-going haunting within the game. Even with those characters who pass through the cycle of reincarnation, there is the interesting possibility of encountering spirits from previous lives: the reincarnated spirit of a former lover or *sensei*, for example. My suspicion is that it would take very good role players to take advantage

Horror: This is an aspect of horror I didn't consider when it was a topic in *IR* #7. It seems that the horrific figures of other cultures don't seem to translate well across boundaries.

of the dramatic possibilities -- but then, there *are* some very good role players out there.



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Comments on Interregnum #8

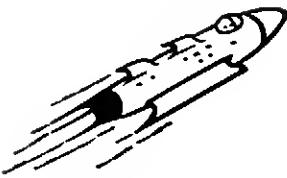
Maranci: Kudos to you on your *haiku*, Maranci-san. They were not only diverse in their scope, but quite amusing. Ω I agree very much with your comments to **Virgil Greene** about the development of **Babylon 5**. For myself, I find it much more interesting than any of the ST permutations currently available. The last few episodes of the first season and the new season have been full of escalating tension, intrigue, and terror. Right now my chief concerns are that (1) it won't stay on the air long enough to complete the 5 year story arc that is already unfolding; and (2) that the writers won't be able to keep the high standard they have established. Deep role playing is indeed an excellent metaphor for the show.

Staats: You're beginning to become a fixture in these pages, Rich. ☺ The briefing sheets for the various characters were fun to read -- and then to speculate how they would play out in the game. I take it you've run this at a con? Any chance of letting us know how it turned out?

Hoberman: Congratulations on landing the *PC Week* internship, David! I hope that it won't be so much work that you vanish from these pages completely. *PC Week*'s gain wouldn't counterbalance our loss. Ω Regarding your comment to **Gil Pili**, I would second heartily the recommendation of Kenneth Branagh's *Frankenstein*. The entire production really captured the Gothic feel of the source material, esp. in how it illuminated the tragic evil within Victor Frankenstein without making him a caricature. The supporting cast is also one of the best I've seen in some time. In the weeks since I saw it, I've been thinking a lot about the message regarding death: in trying to escape it, do we in fact bring it closer to ourselves?



Pili: Ah, you've stolen a march on the rest of us, Gil! Some very interesting thoughts on resurrection. I particularly liked your emphasis on the nature of a character's death, and how it might alter her/his personality upon being resurrected. The question arises if one could even comprehend one's own death. In some of his writings on suicide, Freud made the point that we are unable to comprehend the world except in reference to the self. That is, even if we imagine ourselves "dead," we are still looking at the world from our own point-of-view. Since resurrection presupposes some sort of "soul," perhaps that's not much of



a problem. Ω Thanks for the thoughts on one-shot scenarios, and good luck in your efforts on raiding campuses. I think my problem has been getting graduate students, rather than undergraduates with too much time on their hands. ☺

Meier: Thanks for the latest batch of reviews. I had a marginally related question about the *Star Wars Adventure Journal*. What is the 2nd Edition of the *Star Wars* RPG like? Or more precisely, what did they change from the first edition? I bought the first edition when it came out, and while the templates made for a great pick-up game, the background was restrictive enough that it didn't have lasting appeal among the group at the time. Hence, I never picked up the revised edition.

Phillies: You have actually watched several minutes of the *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers*? You have my deepest sympathy. I assume this was against your will, yes? ☺ Speaking of obscure aircraft, it seems that many previously forgotten warbirds are making a comeback in the explosion of flight simulators/air combat games current on the computer market. I just saw one the other day that had a very arcane collection of early jet aircraft. A personal favorite that I've never seen translated to the small screen is the P-61 "Black Widow." Cool stuff.

Displacement: I wonder if computer RPGs (as oxymoronic as that term may be) have consumed the market for solo RPG adventures?

Taylor: Loved the picture. Ω The *SoloQuest* was fun, although you should probably place more weight on the opinions of *RQ* gurus like **Peter Maranci**. It seems that there isn't much solo material being written these days, unlike years ago when Metagaming had the *Death Test* adventures for *Melee* and Flying Buffalo was turning out solo adventures for *Tunnels & Trolls*. Good luck with your efforts.

Greene: Ummm....not to pick nits, Virgil, but how could a consideration of RPG comics not include J.D. Webster's *Fineous Fingers*? I've enjoyed *Murphy's Rules* over the years, but it doesn't come close to *FF* for a combination of humor and storyline.

Dunham: Actually, David, I wasn't thinking of *Pendragon* when I mentioned rigid sets of personality traits. I think *Pendragon*'s mechanic works very well for simulating the Arthurian mythos in Sir Thomas Malory's style. Any type of personality system can be abused by using it as a club to bash players with, but I think the old **D&D™** alignment system was much worse in terms of dictating rigid codes of behavior.



Reach out and touch someone.....

Butler: Good to have you back with us, Bob, and with such an interesting essay on character behavior. Being that I live in Madison, that bastion of Political Correctness, I was forced to wash my brain out with soap after reading your heretical words, but.... ☺ My chief quibble with your analysis would be a semantic one. There aren't many rabid environmentalists left in the scientific community (although I worry about the rabid geneticists...) who would claim that humans are unlike other animals in not possessing biological predispositions to certain actions. However, I don't think that saying we share certain drives such as hunger, reproduction, or territoriality, is the same thing as saying human value judgements can be placed on natural behavior. It doesn't make much sense to me to say a pack of wolves defending its hunting territory is "good" or "evil" when we have no evidence to suggest they make a conscious moral evaluation of the consequences of their actions. Humans are aware of those consequences, and thus may merit one or more of those moral labels.



REFUGEE # 17

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The contents of this zine are fiction. I would include *Communications*, Letters to the Editor, in which I publish letters or comments from correspondents, if by some chance I ever received one from the readership.

Why 17? Because 17 is the largest prime. (Old MITSFS joke.)

The weekend before Thanksgiving, Collier Collier and Bob Simpson visited New England. A side trip took us to Manchester, NH, where former Hunt contributors Barb Stone and Kathy Smith run a decade-old Champions campaign. Characters are in the 600+ point range. The campaign is not combat-oriented, and runs without a melee are frequent. Collie and Bob are long-time West Coast Champions players. There was much culture shock, resolved in an altogether civilized manner, as the parties discussed possible designs for a character. Your humble reporter ran the junior officer of a three-person combat team (power suits, Imperial Gauss Rifles, Imperial plasma swords), with Collie as commanding officer; I let the two distantly travelled visitors take the characters who did almost all the talking.

I did populate one in-group joke. My character: My grandmother is one of these superheroes you keep asking about. But she fled to Earth from another universe, a universe that died. Other: The universe died?! My character: That universe suffered logic failure and imploded. It no longer exists. The GM and other people in the know were amused.

Fiction

***** CHAPTER FIVE (Mages)

Dorrance Bay was a sheet of slate blue edged with red-granite promontories and dense pine woods. The Academy stood on a small peninsula, almost surrounded by water, so that one could stand anywhere on its grounds and hear the distant rush of ocean waves breaking against the rocks. The central buildings were a cluster of ivory tulips soaring gracefully over the tree tops. Other structures merged into the landscape, looking almost like outcroppings of the native stone.

A solarium perched atop the central tower. Through its crystal dome, five mages could see the clear sky and the sparkling waters of the bay. One mage was a tall young woman, her well-filled figure little hidden by a simple tunic. She pressed her fingers against each other, as though playing with an unseen cat's cradle. A second was a dowager, short and dumpy, in a long woolen dress. The third was a young man, sharp nosed and thin of face, who perpetually glanced about, looking for that which wasn't there. An elderly man in blue fur-trimmed robes held a massy bronze amulet in one hand; he nodded sleepily, occasionally talking to himself. The fifth mage was Grandoon, resplendent in red silk and gold lace, puffing occasionally on his pipe while he let the others talk. A flicker in the air about his head was a displacement spell, venting the sweet smoke of his tobacco into the air beyond the dome.

"So you received her as a dangerous sending from Lord Pyrrin?" The young lady stared at Grandoon, her chin delicately balanced on her fingertips. A shake of her head sent golden strands of hair shimmering across her face. She pushed back her locks, exposing bejewelled earings.

"Vanessa, I only took the most elementary of precautions." Grandoon punctuated his words with waves of his pipe. "If I'd thought she were really dangerous, I'd not have been so cavalier about having her sleep in my cottage. Even," he added hastily, "across the room from my bed. As I said, through my mirror her aura had no structure, no grain at all. That bespeaks magecraft, or untamed power, of a high order indeed."

"That was a neat trick. She just stepped in front of the mirror for you, when she knew what it did? And getting her to damp her aura..." The young man's stream of words was cut short by Grandoon's nod.

"Her outermost aura, Zoltan. She had inner screens. I glimpsed barriers within barriers, walls beyond walls, constantly shifting against each other. I saw what she let me see, and didn't risk forcing her for more."

"You got the memories you asked for. You sweet-talked her into exposing all sorts of things."

"Only if you call those obscure images 'exposing,'" answered Grandoon. "I can't prove her answers were honest. She seemed to know those places, but – sharp as the images were – I couldn't name half of them."

"No." The old man realized he had interrupted, waited for the others' attentions, and finally continued. "No, Vanessa, the most dangerous sending yet found by the Apostate is not a little girl with a sword, but a Vissorant."

"Vissorant? ArchPatriarch, the images named no such creature." The young man realized that Vanessa's question to Grandoon was being answered, that the old man

had heard nought that had been said since.

The ArchPatriarch, Gow's voice upon this earth, continued. "A Vissorant, as noted in the *Celestial Bestiary* of Omar of Timbuk, is a celestial being formed in the image of the stars of heaven, or of the Sun - Omar is a bit unclear about which, or thought they were alike, which is truly a remarkably foolish error for such a clear-sighted man - with all the star's energies, and the will needed to drive them. Omar likened the beast to a great confederation of cities, peopled entirely by mages, with a single all-wise ruler to lead each citizen in perfect harmony. The actual source of Omar's information..."

Vanessa raised one hand. "Wait! Pyrrin can summon this creature for use in warfare?" She hoped he'd notice her question. ArchPatriarch Gowophilus held in his hand the Amulet of Alpertus Magnus, a marvelous source of obscure important facts. The ArchPatriarch's mind wandered a trifle on account of his age. The Amulet, one of the Four Perfect Manifestations of Gow Supernal, distracted its wearers to the point of utter unworldliness. She remembered being a young girl standing in the path of a gale-driven flash fire, trying to raise a Circle of Guard while the Amulet's bearer lectured her - on the importance of flash fires to the breeding habits of condors. It had been most informative, but the distraction had nearly killed them both.

"Hardly. He boasts he knows the gate to its abode, a path through which it peers but cannot approach. The Amulet says he dares not open that path. The creature, by the way, thinks of itself as a whale, feeding on some celestial equivalent of plankton or krill," answered the Archpatriarch.

"A whale, I suppose, is dread by the brine shrimp upon which it feasts." Zoltan snorted and resumed his conversation. "Grandoon, a gaggle of library liches is studying those memories you got from her. The crystals you engraved are real sharp. They figured out a bunch of them. We'll have them all sorted out tomorrow. But there're problems."

"Zoltan, you shouldn't work all the time. It's not good for you." The dowager smiled as she wagged a finger at him. "Those memory crystals were lovely, and you know it. So what if we can't figure out, say, which tree this girl slept under, every night in her life?"

"It's what we figured out that's the problem, Dame Alice. She's a fifteen year old girl, right? So what's she doing with memories of Arburg City Market being built? It went up in the last century. That can't be a real memory! But it makes sense if she were a fake from Pyrrin, a trick to mislead us or kill Grandoon. That explains her mental barriers, too. Automatons have no memories, so if you penetrated her aura, you'd see nothing, and think you weren't inside. The mirror would reflect its own back

face, which is indeed featureless."

"I think, Zoltan, those are avertable errors," answered Grandoon. "Also, I live. Elaine's efforts were instrumental in liberating Arburg-am-Tressin from Pyrrin's minions. If Pyrrin sent her, he injured himself. To what gain? From what were we distracted? If Elaine had not been so mysterious, I would undoubtedly have been elsewhere engaged, but not in striking against the Apostate." He stared at Vanessa's figure. She returned his look. They both smiled.

"Well, suppose she is an artifice," suggested Vanessa. "What did she do? She wouldn't go near Grandoon, let alone try to stab him in his sleep. The cryptic mirror's no secret. Wendane of Agatlog's seen it. What he sees, Pyrrin learns soon thereafter, however much Wendane professes loyalty to the Academy. If she's a spy, she's either very unsuccessful, or very, very clever. Besides, for an artifice to have the memories Grandoon captured, someone had to create them. It would take forever, unless Pyrrin's found some new trick."

"Not forever," corrected Gowophilus. The Amulet led him to continue: "Forever is a long time. The recorded memories could be crafted with standard techniques by a single worker in a mere five months, assuming no loss of concentration, interruption for refreshment or rest, untimely disturbance, or..."

"Five months!" Vanessa's hair flowed in golden waves across her back.

"Vanessa, you forget," intruded Zoltan, "That wasn't a passive exhibit. Grandoon asked the questions, fixed the cues. How'd Pyrrin know which memories to sculpt, which shadings of emotion to give her? If she were a simulacrum, she'd need a whole library of memories, just in case. I mean, what if Grandoon asked something else?"

"I quite agree." Grandoon blew a pair of smoke rings from his pipe, then let the others wait while he watched the rings chase each other upwards. "Pyrrin could not know which memories to prepare. An artful simulacrum might recall on demand a single dream. But these were memories, sharp-engraved, in profusion. Some were recent, too. How could a simulacrum have been given memories of the city being stormed, an event still in the future? Those looked like real memories, too; sculpted dreams are almost always too refined, too uniform in the amount of detail they provide."

"Besides," said Zoltan, "Simulacra are poor combatants. But I ran simulations of her fight with Baron Morgno. We know how good he is, and how rotten her sword was. She should've lost. I mean, here..." He gestured. A projection of Elaine and the Baron appeared in the air above them, the Baron taking a mighty swing at Elaine's head. "This is the fight. It's reduced to extreme dilatory mo-

tion. Watch her sword try to shift out of the parry." Flickers of red highlighted the sword's contortions. "But she counters each of its moves. The timing on that is ..." He gestured again. Numbers appeared by the sword, marking delays between the sword's moves and her responses. "Those times are sort of possible for a mage using intense time distortion spells. But for a normal human, they're..."

"Upper bound of the possible, perhaps," interrupted Vanessa. "That is my Schema you're using to get those numbers, after all. The people I've seen who were close to that fast were – oft as no – accused of numbering dragons in their bloodline. But you're right; that's no simulacrum fighting."

"So she could be a person, if extraordinary. But if she were in all those places, Zoltan, someone would have seen her. Why not have the library memories searched for her likeness?" Dame Alice sounded pleased with her idea.

"For what do we search? Dame Alice, sometimes your suggestions are easier said than accomplished." Zoltan became impatient. "I'm looking for a girl, tall, with brown-blond hair, green eyes, wide shoulders, and an unattractive figure? The Academy has more memory crystals than the rest of the world put together, and probably only a twentieth of the women in the world fit that description. Shall we search all of them?"

"Now, Zoltan, you know I don't want you to work too hard," repeated the Dame. "Besides, you have more clues than that. After all, wouldn't most girls her age hesitate, at least a bit, before attacking a dozen armed men by herself? That's what she did in the gatehouse. Nor can most girls swim a river as wide and swift-flowing as the Tressin, especially in cape and chain mail. Most men couldn't do that. Her barriers against the Presence aren't common. Nor does the typical shield maiden have interest in books of magic."

"Yes, I guess symbolic addition isn't much of an aid to chopping people to pieces."

"Furthermore," added Grandoon, "I would not call her figure unattractive, merely ill-presented. Certainly when she appeared at my cottage three nights ago, soaked to the skin after her swim in the Tressin, I was aghast – purely as a matter of technical curiosity, while providing her with dry garments – to check this in detail. She seemed to believe that events within a mage's home can occur out of his line of sight." Grandoon affected not to notice Vanessa's withering glare. "Besides, she was not reading the *Manual on Symbolic Addition*, she was studying the *Tractatus Symbolicus* – which requires a slightly higher order of mentation."

"She's reading that?" Vanessa clapped her hands on her knees, her glare softening. "Grandoon, you just fall for

every girl who pretends to be bright. That I'd like to see. Kill three assassins, swim a river in twenty pounds of armor, then grind through Treganth for after-dinner reading? You don't really believe a girl her age, and talentless too, could understand Treganth?"

"From her questions, she did. We talked long enough to be sure that they were real questions, too, not something memorized to impress me. I set questions to her, to answer – questions from your Doctoral examination, which she answered as handily as you did. Of course, if she saw Arburg Market in building, she'd not really be 'her age'. Why, she might be as old a crone as you are, Vanessa." He ducked as she tossed a cushion, then turned to the ArchPatriarch. "I take it the Amulet is of no aid?"

"I am, frankly, confused," answered Gowophilus. "Usually the Amulet makes everything of importance so totally clear. All the Amulet told me, that while we were experiencing her memories of the Gate Tower, is that she is the proverbial coward."

"Oh, great!" Zoltan couldn't contain himself. "The one time we really need a useless obscure fact for a clue, that thing flips its wig. She jumped 20 guards, shrugged off three assassins, was prepared to duel an Imperial Baron and a dozen retainers by herself, and It calls her a coward? What does It think a *brave* person would do? Renounce sharp instruments, and fight with a wooden spoon?"

"Now, Zoltan, you are unfair. The Amulet of Alpertus Magnus only bestows those clues which Gow the Allwise allows It to entrust to us, in His Own Incomprehensible Way. Besides, the Amulet did not say that she was a coward. It said that she was literally the ultimate coward, in the proverbial sense," countered the Archpatriarch.

"Which proverb?" asked Dame Alice.

"Alas, the proverb is apparently well-known, since the Amulet refuses to reveal which proverb was intended. As you know, Alpertus Magnus was an adherent of the Dogma of Transcendental Irrelevance – the Revealed Truth that only obscure facts are truly of value. He created the Amulet as a symbol of his faith and piety. Since the proverb is obvious, it cannot be truly useful, so the Amulet will not lower itself by naming it," the Archpatriarch continued.

Grandoon intruded as the ArchPatriarch faded his voice and began talking to himself. "Also, Zoltan, there were limits to what she could fight by herself. When she thought she need fight the Baron and all his retainers, she had no expectation that she might win, though her feelings seemed to be not fear in the face of death, but resignation in the face of an unpleasant duty. The Baron hurt her."

"Yes, but did he beat her?" Zoltan shook his head. "Any

sending would claim human limits, whether it had them or not. We're used to seeing within, to know the heart, to tell whether someone is lying or not. How can you judge anyone whose mind is closed?"

"Common folk do," Dame Alicia answered.

"Dame Alicia, they do not! They guess, and don't trust known liars, and pay us to bond contracts, and are always marks for the crook who saves his one lie for last. Where does that leave us?" Zoltan asked.

"Perhaps," said Vanessa, "it leaves us trying to name a proverb. Of course, for a Gowist – an Illuminant, I should say – there is one totally obvious proverb, that expounding the prime virtue: 'a brave man dies but once; a coward may survive a thousand deaths'. But that's hardly a literal blessing of cowardice. Elaine didn't seem to have patrons, clerical or mageborn, to bring her back if she died."

"Grandoon," asked Dame Alicia, "Can she possibly be a real person, who someone has seen and remembered? Her resistance to spellcraft could be an unusual artifact. The way people forget her might be done by a very clever spell, or a demon, though patrons able to summon demons are people we can name. I don't think Pyrrin is on that list; one of the few topics on which we agree with him is that such summonings are unwise. Could she be a dragon? They could do these things. Are they entering the affairs of men again?"

"One doesn't need dragons to have strange artifacts," said Grandoon.

"I was thinking of her speed and endurance, not to mention healing so quickly. The strength wasn't conventional sorcery – levitation spells instead of muscle. The disturbance in the Presence couldn't possibly be missed. Someone who drank enough strength elixir could duplicate her acts, but they'd burn out – be left abed for a fortnight."

"Which she was not," noted Grandoon, "She was tired, and chilled by the river. She ate substantially and slept soundly, not more."

"From your images, she had broad shoulders, and real muscle in her arms – which many women do not. She showed more strength and endurance than most men. That's not common," answered Vanessa.

"It has," said the ArchPatriarch, "to do with flying. Could she fly, Grandoon?"

"She swam the Tressin. Anyone who could fly would choose the faster, not to mention more comfortable, way across. It's not as though water would protect her from competent spellcasting. But why is flying important?"

"The Amulet reminds me in great detail of an Elector

of Lys, some centuries past, a pious collector and manufacturer of enchanted machines. He built a mechanical dragon, its wings driven by stallions hidden in its belly. The machine weighed less than a dragon; its wings were marvels of craftsmanship, duplicating properly the motions of real wings. The machine glided well, but never flew, never ascended. I conclude that some difference between natural and mechanical flight is involved."

The archmages considered the Amulet's revelation, trusting the clue but not the ArchPatriarch's interpretation. Vanessa finally spoke. "No, not flight. But there's a difference between dragons and horses. Dragons are creatures of the Presence, using its power to enhance native bone, muscle, and sinew. A few chains hold an elephant. A dragon the same size rends iron chains link from link, shatters stone cliffs with its tail, and breathes fire. The effect is like a strength potion without side-effects. Perhaps the girl is bespelled."

"And how," asked Dame Alice, "Did someone cast this spell on our young lady, if she cannot be enchanted? The notion founders on simple fact. Grandoon had glimpses within her aura, and saw no spells at work. Besides, strength spells do exhaust their recipients."

"Dragons' spells," noted Gowophilus, "do not injure their casters, however much Great Worms are fond of slumber and contemplation. Being within her own aura, Elaine could have enchanted herself. Now, as to causing someone to cast a spell on themself without leaving signs, the best method – advocated (says the Amulet) by Harrek the Invincible himself – acts even on children. One works the rune into the decor of their rooms, their ceiling and bedspread and quilt and carpet, so that no matter where they look they take that pattern into their mind. If the child has any talent at all, the method is nearly fool-proof, the child casting the spell without conscious thought."

"Elaine was not a child, notwithstanding that she firmly preferred sleeping in isolation. And who," asked Grandoon, "except a dragon knows the hidden spells of another dragon? She ate enough for one, and healed as quickly. Rarely do the great worms assume human form, though I've seen it done successfully."

"Recently?" asked Dame Alicia. "Elaine had to fool not only commoners, but also competent mages."

"It's possible against the unsuspecting. You may recall a ten-year ago we had a visiting astrologer, one Michael d'Cosmaine, who one of our colleagues kept attempting to lure, I believe unsuccessfully, off to bed," answered Grandoon.

"Grandoon." Vanessa's voice was menacingly low. "I don't discuss your former girlfriends..."

"Just as well. Uh, the lack of success, I mean. Michael's

transformation spell required a certain minimum of concentration, absent which – say, if he had been excessively distracted, as by the passionate caresses of an remarkably attractive young lady – he would resume his native form. Certainly, I can't imagine anyone wanting to share a bed with thirty tons of reptile."

"Oh, no, I don't know anyone like that," commented Vanessa swiftly.

"I remember Michael," said Dame Alice. "A well-bred young man, not given to partying or undergraduate mischief or – he was a dragon?"

"Precisely," answered Grandoon. "Ahle to fool the unsuspecting. I thought it obvious. Admissions and the Gatekeeper knew all along. But why would a dragon do what Elaine did? There's no motive. Assuming, of course, that she fooled me, which I doubt. I looked for that possibility. Perhaps she's human. She might have a spell that we lack. It wouldn't be the first we can't name, nor the most important."

"You're still looking for the Mayevin mage-hinding?" asked Zoltan.

"The most important spell in all the world, the rune whose power would shatter the Apostate's slavocracy forever. I search but do not find. Through the hinding, a mage who abused his talents felt such agony that no tonic could relieve the pain. My only clue is a fragment, remembered fifty years after the fact by an unlettered porter who heard a conversation between two princes. But who was the 'Ahhot of Inn Witte' whose secret was found by the Mayevins? Inns commonly do not have Ahbots, but no inn of this title has been found."

"I wish we knew Pyrrin's plans," said Vanessa. "He usually plays several cards at once."

"If we knew all we wished, Vanessa, we'd die of horedom," chided Dame Alice. "If we knew all we wished, Grandoon could name the track of the Nightstar."

"The Nightstar," snarled Grandoon, "is a monstrosity, offending against all reason. For centuries, we came closer and closer to the laws that lock the planets in their paths through the zodiac. Almost we had it. And then! No sooner did Tegel-Sorin dissolve into the Belt of Heaven than this thing appeared, as if bound to the sphere of Tegel-La, moving in violent contradiction to the revealed principles of the Art."

"I still think it's enchanted," said Zoltan.

"Think as you will. No means of scrying, no mirror however polished, reveals the faintest trace of enchantment near it. Besides, Harrek the Lesser set scrying halls in perpetual circle about the earth – to study the weather. They're still there; you can still study weather with them.

Despite being enchanted, they follow the march of the Zodiac, their path being perturbed by semi-conjunction with Tegel-La. The Nightstar's march is oblivious to Tegel-La's presence. Now, if you're quite through rubbing salt into that wound, I do have certain scholarly obligations to perform." Grandoon led his fellow archmages down from their tower.

Who Is John Galt? #9

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R Q A D V S O P D A S T M S A R D A D V S O P D A S

Runequest News

RQ Adventures #4 is out. This issue puts the spotlight on The Fall of Whitewall. The PCs can be present in Whitewall during the final hours of the siege by the Lunar Army. This adventure and the accompanying background material on the city of Whitewall are written by John Castellucci. Also included in this issue: 'Plants of the Southern Kingdom' by Eric Rowe, the adventure 'After Taxes' by John E. Boyle, a section of encounters entitled 'Rebellion in Sartar' by John Castellucci, four pages of NPCs by Denise and John Castellucci, and the artwork of Ivan Gatt.

John Castellucci also reports that he is sold out of issue number 2, and has a limited supply of issues number 1 and 3. Announced are RQ Adventures #5 and Best of RQA 1.

This issue has some typos in it, and my copy had four of the pages switched around. Besides these quality control problems, this fanzine is highly recommended by me to all Gloranthan and RQ fans.

To order this fanzine, contact John Castellucci at the following address:

RQ Adventures
2006 22nd Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94116
email: grendel@sfsu.edu

Henk Langeveld, the administrator of the RuneQuest Daily, reports that he no longer

has the time nor resources to continue the RuneQuest Daily.

Because of this, Loren Miller will now maintain a Gloranthan mailing list, not linked specifically to any game system.

Send electronic mail to Majordomo@hops.wharton.upenn.edu with "help" in the body of the message for subscription information on this new mailing list.

R Q A D V S O P D A S T M S A R D A D V S O P D A S

Comments On *Interregnum* #8

I have not yet received my copy of *IR* #8 due to a confused post office, so no comments at this time.



R Q A D V S O P D A S T M S A R D A D V S O P D A S

SoloQuest The Myths of Orlanth

Due to work and social commitments, the second chapter of this scenario will be contained in the next issue of *WiJG*?

R Q A D V S O P D A S T M S A R D A D V S O P D A S

Fallen Empires

As usual, I have included the list of the newest *Magic: The Gathering* cards as soon as I got my hands on it.

Colophon: Produced on my friendly Macintosh Quadra 660AV (20/240) (AKA ~~Macintosh~~) using Microsoft Word 5.1. Graphics courtesy of New Heights, 10483 South Amaryllis, Sandy, UT 84094. Printed on my rusty HP DeskWriter. Photocopied and collated for inclusion in *Interregnum* #9 by Peter Maranci.

Fallen Empires

BLACK-Common

Armor Thrall-Kirschner
Armor Thrall-Menges
Armor Thrall-Spencer
Armor Thrall-Venters
Basal Thrall-Kaja Foglio
Basal Thrall-Phil Foglio
Basal Thrall-Kane-Ferguson
Basal Thrall-Rush
Hymn to Tourach-Danforth
Hymn to Tourach-Hoover
Hymn to Tourach-Kirschner
Hymn to Tourach-Van Camp
Initiates of the Ebon Hand-D
Initiates of the Ebon Hand-F
Initiates of the Ebon Hand-H
Mindstab Thrull-Hudson
Mindstab Thrull-Kane-Ferguson
Mindstab Thrull-Tedin
Necrite-Rush
Necrite-Spencer
Necrite-Tucker
Order of the Ebon Hand-Benson
Order of the Ebon Hand-Rush
Order of the Ebon Hand-Spencer

BLACK-Uncommon

Breeding Pit
Derelor
Ebon Praetor
Soul Exchange
Thrull Champion
Thrull Retainer
Thrull Wizard
Tourach's Chant
Tourach's Gate

BLUE-Common

High Tide-Maddock
High Tide-Tucker
High Tide-Weber
Homarid-Hoover
Homarid-Hudson
Homarid-Tedin
Homarid-Wackwitz
Homarid Warrior-AF
Homarid Warrior-Shuler
Homarid Warrior-?
Merseine-Hudson
Merseine-Organ-Keane
Merseine-Tucker
Merseine-Venters
Tidal Flats-A/Sky
Tidal Flats-A/Ground
Tidal Flats-Everingham
Vodalian Soldiers-Benson
Vodalian Soldiers-KF
Vodalian Soldiers-Menges
Vodalian Soldiers-Van Camp
Vodalian Mage-Hoover
Vodalian Mage-Poole
Vodalian Mage-Van Camp

BLUE-Uncommon

Deep Spawn
Homarid Shaman
Homarid Spawning Bed
River Merfolk
Seasinger
Svyelunite Priest
Tidal Influence

GREEN-Common

Vedalian Knight
Vadalian War Machine
Elven Fortress-AF
Elven Fortress-Poole
Elven Fortress-Venters
Elven Fortress-Wanerstrand
Elvish Hunter-Maddocks
Elvish Hunter-Poole
Elvish Hunter-Van Camp
Elvish Scout-Poole
Elvish Scout-Rush
Elvish Scout-Venters
Night Soil-Everingham
Night Soil-Hudson
Night Soil-Tucker
Spore Cloud-Myrfors
Spore Cloud-Van Camp
Spore Cloud-Weber
Thallid-Beard
Thallid-Gelon
Thalli-Myrfors
Thallid-Spencer
Thorn Thallid-Gelon
Thorn Thallid-Hudson
Thorn Thallid-Myrfors
Thorn Thallid-Tedin

GREEN-Uncommon

Elvish Farmer
Feral Thallid
Fungal Bloom
Spore Flower
Thallid Devourer
Thelon's Chant
Thelon's Curse
Thelonite Druid
Thelonite Monk

RED-Common

Brassclaw Orcs-A/Helmet
Brassclaw Orcs-A/Spear
Brassclaw Orcs-A/Frazier
Brassclaw Orcs-A/Hudson
Dwarven Soldier-Alexander
Dwarven Soldier-AF
Dwarven Soldier-Shuler
Goblin Chirurgeon-Frazier
Goblin Chirurgeon-Foglio
Goblin Chirurgeon-Gelon
Goblin Grenade-Frazier
Goblin Grenade-Spencer
Goblin Grenade-Rush
Goblin War Drums-Frazier
Goblin War Drums-Hudson
Goblin War Drums-KF
Goblin War Drums-Menges
Orcish Spy-Gelon
Orcish Spy-Van Camp
Orcish Spy-Venters
Orcish Veteran-Benson
Orcish Veteran-Frazier
Orcish Veteran-Hoover
Orcish Veteran-Shuler

RED-Uncommon

Dwarven Armorer
Dwarven Catapult
Dwarven Lieutenant
Goblin Flotilla

Goblin Kites

Goblin Warrens
Orcish Captain
Orgg
Raiding Party

WHITE-Common

Combat Medic-Beard
Combat Medic-Danforth
Combat Medic-Maddocks
Combat Medic-Van Camp
Farrel's Zealot-Beard
Farrel's Zealot-Benson
Farrel's Zealot-Kane-Ferguson
Icatian Infantry-Beard
Icatian Infantry-Rush
Icatian Infantry-Shuler
Icatian Infantry-Tucker
Icatian Javelineers-Beard
Icatian Javelineers-Benson
Icatian Javelineers-Kirschner
Icatian Moneychanger-Beard
Icatian Moneychanger-Benson
Icatian Moneychanger-Tucker
Icatian Scout-Alexander
Icatian Scout-Kane Ferguson
Icatian Scout-Foglio
Icatian Scout-Shuler
Order of Leitbur-Asplund-Faith
Order of Leitbur-W/Female
Order of Leitbur-W/Male

WHITE-Uncommon

Farrel's Mantle
Farrelite Priest
Hand of Justice
Heroism
Icatian Lieutenant
Icatian Phalanx
Icatian Priest
Icatian Skirmishers
Icatian Town

ARTIFACTS-Common

Delif's Cone

ARTIFACTS-Uncommon

Aeolipile
Balm of Restoration
Conch Jorn
Delif's Cube
Draconian Cylex
Elven Lyre
Implements of Sacrifice
Ring of Renewal
Spirit Shield
Zelyon Sword

LAND-Uncommon

Bottomless Vault
Swarven Hold
Dwarven Ruins
Ebon Stronghold
Havenwood Battleground
Hollow Trees
Icatian Store
Rainbow Vail
Ruins of Trokair
Sand Silos
Svyelunite Temple

THE EIGHT TRACK MIND #VIII

Ramblings on RPGs, SF, and Misc.

© Virgil S. Greene November 1994
email: klyfix@ace.com

"It was after the Apocalypse. No one could escape the... Republican Holocaust!"- heavily modified from Robot Holocaust on MST3K

Well, it's not that bad. :) We suddenly find that the next Congress will be dominated by Republicans for the first time in forty years. We shall see if the Republican rhetorics work or will fail when implemented in real life. My money is on failure myself, but I think it is important for the long term future of the country that they be given the chance to fail so that the myth of how Reaganomics worked except for the interference of the Democrats may be laid to rest.

What's this got to do with role-playing games? Well, in a worst case scenario the GOP victory is the first step to the Cyberpunk future where the majority of the populace lives in miserable conditions and most of those who are not in squalor are the bondslaves of multinational corporations.

Enough of my evil liberal rantings! On to our Official Subject...

RESURRECTION

Torzax sighed. He had travelled for many months in search of the evil Quorxkili, the sorcerer who had ordered his family slain when Torzax's father would not give him his eldest daughter to wed. His companions, Eldnor the gentle healer and Norlax the mage had suffered much in aiding his quest. And now, when it seemed that the quest was over they once again had only discovered another of Quorxkili's abandoned keeps.

A flash of light! A sound like a clap of thunder! Suddenly the evil mage was before them. "You bother me!" he scowled as glowing energies lashed out from his hands engulfing Torzax. Eldnor and Norlax were stunned; but Torzax, though injured, howled in rage and attacked the sorcerer. His sword burst into flame as he rushed Quorxkili, knowing that only by attacking him suddenly with magical fire could he kill him before the mage blasted the life out of him. His sword moved like lightning, preventing the wizard from casting another spell or

even effectively defending himself. Quorxkili, his flesh horribly burned, dropped motionless to the ground.

"They are avenged!" Torzax shouted in triumph over the body of his foe. In his exultation, he failed to note the building glow around Quorxkili. Norlax, suddenly able to see what was happening tried to cry a warning. But before he could say a word, a blinding explosive flash burst from Quorxkili knocked Torzax twenty meters into the air. He fell in a sickening "thump" to the ground, his body reddened by the strange magical force. Eldnor ran to him. "He...he...he's...dead!" she said.

Here we have a character that has been played for several sessions, raised to high levels or skills, killed just as he achieves a major character goal. The player should be happy that his PC got to go out with a bang and just roll up a new character, right?

Well, after one has suffered with a character for an extended time, built him up from his puny beginnings, and finally achieved a heroic level of power one may not want to start over. Not just because a new character will likely be weaker, but because the old character has grown and developed. So most fantasy role playing systems allow for the possibility of Resurrection; bringing a character back from the dead.

THE SPELL

Eldnor laid her hands on the motionless body of Torzax, and looked to the heavens. As she called on the power of healing magics, a faint glow went from her hands to engulfing the hero's limp body. With a gasp, and a sudden jerk, Torzax returned to the lands of the living. Eldnor embraced her friend and lover.

Here's a problem. When Resurrection is this freely available death becomes essentially meaningless. Eldnor's distress at Torzax's death is short term because she knows that she'll just raise him again, and again, and again. It also detracts from the heroism or foolhardiness of Torzax's

charge of the sorcerer. He knows that if he dies, it will only be temporary. Other than the pain, death is just an inconvenience.

Now if the spell is only recoverable by some great sacrifice, or requires a sacrifice at the time of casting it becomes more meaningful and will perhaps make our healer think seriously before performing resurrections. The sacrifice could take the form of life energy (POW in RQ or Call of Cthulhu, maybe a level in level based systems) or physical attributes.

THE PROFESSIONALS

Eldnor threw herself across her lover's body. She cried until the tears would no longer come. "We must take him to the high healers!" she told Norlax.

"But that will take all our earnings for the last year!" he said. Eldnor's glare at that comment was perhaps the most frightening thing he saw that day. And in his heart of hearts, he knew that he owed Torzax and wanted him back at his side.

Perhaps Resurrection is only possible from certain priests or sorcerer. In that event, it will likely be expensive. Not necessarily in money; the priests may have some other mode of payment in mind. Our heroes could find themselves committed to a quest more dangerous than the pursuit of an evil sorcerer. And it is entirely possible that the priests will reject the request, leaving the party to haul the body to another group of priests that might be more willing or perhaps desperate for heroes to perform a quest.

THE QUEST

Eldnor and Norlax sat by Torzax's lifeless body in mourning. "How can one be brought down in the prime of life? It isn't right!" Eldnor said. Norlax grimly said to her, "There is a way to bring him back. But if it fails, we shall be in the land of the dead; with him or...elsewhere." Eldnor took his hand. "I am willing", she said.

It is entirely possible that to resurrect someone it would be necessary to find the person's spirit in the spirit plane (netherworld, afterlife) and bring them back to their body. Usually one would need assistance from some sort of specialist, but it is possible that a party member might well know the rituals, spells, or even a place on the physical plane

where it is possible to go to the spirit realm or wherever the dead go.

There's problems with this of course. Our heroes have to deal with the rulers and/or residents of this place. They might not like people leaving, or they may require some sort of payment. It might be a very expensive payment; more of those deadly quests, perhaps. And it is also possible that the spirit may be perfectly happy in the afterlife and not want to come back. Plus of course there's always the possibility of some sort of condition set by the rulers of the realm or the natural laws of the place that must be upheld for the spirit to return. Remember Orpheus; don't look back.

THE CHANGED

Eldnor stood by the campfire, lost in thought. She was keeping watch as Norlax slept, but her mind was on her lost love Torzax. Then she heard a twig snap. She turned, and started to shout an alarm when she heard a familiar voice.

"Quiet, you'll wake him. You know how grumpy Norlax gets when he's woken unnecessarily."

"Torlax? You're dead!"

"I got better."

She rushed to embrace him, not caring for the moment just how he came back. He kissed her, and then whispered in her ear, "Do not be afraid. I only need a little." She wondered why he said that...until she felt Torlax's sharp fangs bite into her neck and his mouth sucking, drawing out her blood. Sated, Torlax said, "It is nearly sunrise. I must be going; but please remember I would never harm you. I will always be with you."

Later that morning she found no wounds. She thought that it was a dream, until she noticed a tiny blood stain on her collar and a wild red rose of the type Torax always gave her when he felt romantic. She wasn't sure whether to be happy or terrified.

Here we have a rather odd sort of "resurrection". Somehow, the spell that "killed" Torlax actually turned him into a vampire. A very mild sort of vampire that doesn't need to kill to survive, but still a vampire. In this case our heroes do not need to take any action to raise him from the dead, but they may be inclined to return him to the grave.

Of course it's possible that our fallen comrade might not come back in a benevolent form. In AD&D, Eldnor would have lost a level feeding Torlax unless the DM used a radically different vampire; there isn't a nice way for a vampire to feed. And it's possible that the change to undead status might change the character's personality and temperament. Torlax might be gradually turning Eldnor into a vampire. Or he could have come back and used her initial joy at seeing him to get in close enough to rip her throat out.

This is a bit of a difficult one to pull off, I suspect. Many adventuring parties would just whip out the stakes and kill their one time comrade. Other sorts of undead other than vampires would be possible here also, but of course they'd need to be intelligent varieties. It wouldn't be much fun playing a mindless zombie, after all.

And of course our fallen hero may come back from the dead without being an undead. He may not actually have been dead; the healer may have missed signs of life in her distress or willfully ignored signs of life out of a desire to see him dead. Or he could be some other sort of being; an Immortal like on Highlander perhaps.

THE ABANDONED

"Are you certain Torlax is dead?" Norlax asked?

"Yes, absolutely", Eldnor said sadly.

"That means...we can finally be together!" Norlax cried.

They rushed into a passionate embrace filled with long suppressed desire. "But wait", Eldnor said, "there's something we must do."

"Of course", said Norlax. The two then proceeded to strip Torlax's body of all his material possessions.

The next day, the new lovers came across a young warrior who looked lost. "Do you know the way to Ess Tra?" he asked.

"We happen to be heading in that direction, and we could use the company and the assistance in carrying some equipment", Norlax said. The young warrior gladly joined them, and carried the last

possessions of Torlax for them other than the great magic blade Flamestrike which Norlax wore.

He looked at Flamestrike longingly. "Mighty fine sword you have there", he said.

"Yes", Norlax said, "it belonged to a late friend." Norlax noted the strange resemblance between the young warrior and Torlax in his youth. Maybe he'd become worthy of this sword, he thought, but this time Eldnor is mine.

Sometimes, the survivors of the party are just not going to want to resurrect their fallen comrade even if it is possible. They may actually dislike the guy. It may take more than they feel it would be worth. The deceased may have believed that once you die you should remain in your opponent afterlife. Or maybe, as in the above example, they had other desires that the dead character had interfered with or prevented.

In some cases the player of the fallen character may not want him or her resurrected; they may be leaving the campaign or they might want to try a new character. Even if the rest of the party resurrects them, it should be possible for the character to leave; you shouldn't force a player to keep a character just because the rest of the party has uses for them.

A bigger problem is when the player wants to continue playing the character but the rest of the party won't resurrect them. One option could be to have them come back as an undead; imagine the chaos if Torlax came back after Eldnor and Norlax became lovers! Or some other person or entity might resurrect the character for their own purposes. The problem is that if the rest of the party doesn't want this character in the party and that's why they didn't resurrect him there will be a lot of unease and potential conflict. There's enough that can go wrong with campaigns without more strains.

THE FINAL AUTHORITY

Eldnor and Norlax were distressed. The wizard Orlackoffann had told them that the magics that killed Torlax made resurrection impossible. There was nothing more to be done but to bury their friend.

They buried him the next morning with a lock of Eldnor's hair and a talisman for the dead from

Norlax. They prayed silently to their various deities, and went sadly on their way.

Ultimately and finally the decision on resurrection rests with the GM. How available do you want resurrection to be? Do you want death to only be a minor inconvenience that doesn't interfere greatly in the progress of the campaign? Do you want it to be a major undertaking, perhaps even an adventure in itself? Do you want it to not even be available at all; perhaps only a myth?

And sometimes, even if resurrection is available, you may well not want a character resurrected. It may not make sense at that time for the character to be resurrected. The character may be disruptive and you may want him or her to stay dead. Or the player may want their character to stay dead. Well, come up with a good, game world consistent reason for the character to stay dead.

THE NEW STUFF REVIEW

* Arena by William R. Forstchen HarperPrism

Arena is the first novel based on or inspired by the collectable card game Magic: The Gathering. It is in fact copyrighted by Wizards of the Coast but published by HarperPrism: a new SF/Fantasy line of HarperCollins Publishers.

The story is about Garth, called One Eye, a fighter. Fighters in this setting are not the muscular grunts we generally picture but users of magic who sometimes are also skilled in physical combat. He has travelled to a great city to participate in a Festival held every year that features a tournament of fighters from the four great fighter Houses. The winner of the tournament is supposed to join a being called the Watcher who travels between universes and returns to this land on the last day of the Festival. Garth is not a member of any of those houses, making it illegal for him to participate in the tournament or even be a fighter.

Garth finds himself involved in an illegal street fight and is aided in evading the authorities by Hammen, head of the local thieves. Hammen also has some experience in gambling on fights and ends up working for Garth as his servant as Garth tries to join one of the fighter Houses so that he can

compete in the tournament. Garth also has the aid of an aspiring Benalish Hero and Varena, a powerful fighter of one of the houses at various times. Varena and Norreen (the Benalish woman) are romantic rivals for Garth to an extent.

Ah, but Garth also has other plans. He ends up be a member of all the houses at one point or another and in the process creates a lot of havoc. He also earns the attention of the Grand Master of the Arena; the most powerful fighter of all who runs the city. He acquired his position by aiding the old Grand Master in the destruction of the lost fifth fighter House and the pillaging of its mana resources as the old Grand Master sought the power to become the Watcher. He suspects that Garth is more than he seems.

Most of the story consists of Garth escaping death by the authorities or displeased House Masters, the plottings by the House Masters or the Grand Master or Garth, and a lot of fights in and out of the Arena. The Grand Master tries to keep his control over the huddled masses of the city and profit from his corrupt gambling concessions in the tournament while hoping to achieve the same status as the Watcher. And of course it all builds up to the ultimate confrontations.

Now the big question: Is the book any good? Well, the plot is a fairly decent fantasy adventure with a lot of action with a less than perfect hero obsessed with achieving a goal to the point of closing his eyes to an extent to the casualties he causes along the way. It reflects the Magic: the Gathering game fairly well as far as the combats go, particularly in the Arena, and handles anted spells pretty well although in the real life game you don't get to keep your opponents deck if you actually kill him. :)

On the downside, I didn't find the fantasy world to be terribly believable. The world implied in the card game is much more interesting; I'd rather read about the conflict between Mishra and Urza (and of course their sister Fweezl :)) or the struggles of the Sarpadian kingdoms. I also found the story to not be particularly well written as far as style: our resident writers like George Phillips or Peter Maranci are better overall.

My final verdict is that the book really isn't worth buying if you are not into MtG. However, if

you like the game you should pick up the book if for no other reason than to be able to get the unique cards. The Arena card allows you to pit the power of one of your creatures against the power of a creature of an opponent's choice; great for killing off creatures if you have a large monster. It's a land card. Sewers of Estarck allows you to either make a creature unblockable or prevent a blocking creature from getting or delivering damage. This is a black spell that takes two black and two colorless mana to cast; a bit expensive for what you get.

Final odd note. I had never heard of the writer William R. Forstchen before. But much to my surprise I saw his name recently in a Boston Globe article about a book he's writing with new Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich. The book is about an alternate time line in which Germany never declares war on the US. Apparently there's a reference to a female character as a "sex kitten" and one reference to a Lt. George Bush as "goofy" was removed. Ultimately the Germans attack in an effort to destroy the Manhattan Project. Forstchen is mentioned as being a historian and SF writer who has written a dozen books. I've seen one (other than Arena) mentioned in the SF magazine Locus and I understand he's worked on a couple book series. I'd guess that he does things like Arena and the Gingrich novel to pay the bills. :)

Star Trek: Generations

The seventh Trek movie is also the first featuring the Next Generations crew; only Kirk, Chekov, and Scotty appear from the original crew. It is intended as a sort of bridge between the films with the cast of the original Star Trek and the future films featuring the cast of Star Trek: The Next Generation.

The film starts with the christening of the Enterprise B; Kirk, Chekov, and Scotty are there for the ceremony because of their illustrious careers on the previous Enterprises. While taking the ship on a little cruise of the solar system, they receive a distress call from a ship full of El Aurian refugees trapped in a strange ribbon of energy. Naturally, the only ship within range is the Enterprise, so they rush to the rescue despite the ship being not quite ready for service yet. When they get there, they attempt to rescue the refugees but only manage to beam about forty aboard and that with difficulty because the

people were shifting in and out of some other dimension. Among the refugees, we see the familiar face of Guinan. The Enterprise had difficulty in escaping and in the process Capt. Kirk was lost and recorded in history as having died.

Skip 78 years into the future; the present of STNG. A research station is attacked and the Enterprise goes to the rescue. When they get there we see that the head researcher is one of the El Aurian refugees rescued by the Enterprise B. The researcher is secretly working with trilithium, an artificial substance that can dampen fusion reactions to the point of being able to collapse stars. He wants to alter the path of the ribbon by collapsing some stars, producing gravitational distortions. By bringing the ribbon close to a planetary surface, he hopes to hop into the ribbon and into the Nexus; a sort of paradise that the El Aurian refugees experienced before the transporters jerked them away. Unfortunately one of the stars he wants to collapse has an inhabited planet with 250 million inhabitants. It doesn't help that he's also working with the Duras sisters who believe that trilithium could make a great weapon for their attempts to take over the Klingon Empire.

Naturally Captain Picard and company wish to prevent this, but there's complications. Geordi gets captured by the researcher and is beamed on to the Duras sisters ship. Data finally gets his emotion chip installed but has problems handling his emotions to the point of being so overcome with fear that he allowed Geordi to be captured. Ultimately it comes down to a face to face confrontation with the researcher (sorry, I can't remember his name) versus Picard and Kirk, who wasn't quite dead yet.

As an installment of Trek, it was roughly average but it failed on some continuity points. Why is Guinan so mysterious on STNG when she was on the El Aurian refugee ship and her identity established? Why are they unable to adjust the shields to block the Klingon phasers when they were quite able to do this while fighting the Borg? I also think that the whole storyline about Data getting emotions would have worked better as an episode of STNG. Actually, the whole movie would have better as two or three episodes of STNG.

As an SF movie, well... I can't say that it was particularly good. The movie doesn't work as a separate entity; only as a installment of Trek. We

don't learn enough about anything in the film to understand what's going on without having seen at least some STNG. The basic story is really pretty silly, pretty much a plot for a B movie. The last episode of STNG was actually better. The acting is pretty good; Shatner is really quite decent, Brent Spiner is better than he needs to be, Patrick Stewart is good as always, and Malcolm McDowell makes a very good insane scientist. This film really could have been a whole lot better but I don't think it'll kill the franchise.

MISCELLANEOUS STUFF

A future issue of Shadis magazine will feature two unique cards for Mayfair's Sim City collectable card game. One will feature the Shadis office and staff. More reasons to pick up one of the best gaming magazines currently produced.

I'd like to see unique Magic cards featuring the people of IR and/or their characters. How about a Termite the Tree-Killing Druid card featuring Scott Ferrier as Termite? Special power: +3/+3 when attacking or blocking Treefolk. :)

While the In Nomine RPG has been delayed so that Steve Jackson Games can get their Illuminati: New World Order collectable card game out on time, I've already seen In Nomine book covers (Dragonskins by Chessex) at Complete Strategist in Boston.

Interestingly, Wizards of the Coast loaned Steve Jackson Games money for the first printing of INWO. That's quite nice of them, but of course this is all part of establishing the trading card game genre. Also, SJG is looking at producing blank INWO cards for "proxies" and for homemade cards. This would be for friendly games, obviously. This from Pyramid #10; run out and get more information and lots of other good stuff.

I've suggested flippantly that the GOP successes in November must be due to M:tG. This is in response to the notion that M:tG is somehow destroying role-playing, an opinion being expressed to the point of being insulting and annoying. But now that I know that the author of Arena is working with Gingrich Khan (from a MacNelley editorial comic) on a book I have to wonder. Maybe subliminal messages are on the cards. :)

Watch the Gerry Anderson show Space Precinct sometime. It's cheap to be sure, and it can be a bit silly. But in its own way it is a pretty entertaining show and even a bit creative and different.

The Boston Globe had a front page article on Magic: the Gathering. It was more or less positive, but neglected that it spawned a slew of other trading card games. Still, it means that M:tG is spreading into the general populace's awareness. They sell the basic set of cards (but not limited expansions) at regular toy stores now. When will the Saturday morning cartoon come out, I wonder?

LOOKING BACKWARD

After noting how my reviews in the Short Takes On Books section ended up being rather excessively long, I've elected to retitile to the New Stuff Review, the Used Stuff Review, and so on.

COMMENTS ON IR #8

* THE LOG THAT FLIES #8 Peter Maranci

On TSR: My impression is that TSR is run by businessmen and not gamers. Other companies seem to have a much better attitude towards gamer creativity, except of course for Palladium.

* RUNEQUEST CON MODULE
Rich Staats

An interesting module, but I note that there doesn't seem to be an ending as such. Is it intended as a starting point?

* THE SKELETON KEY #12 David Hoberman

On RPG as art: I think gamemastering, playing, and adventure and module creation are arts. Role-playing itself most resembles, well, a game. I think you can lose the fun of a game if you try to hard to achieve art.

* STRANGE SANDS Gilbert Pili

On Resurrection: Hmm, a little early here. :)

On Star Gate: Hey, most movie SF stinks. It isn't written by SF writers generally and neither is TV SF with the exception (to an extent) of Babylon 5.

On one shots: I want to try some sometime, actually. I've run one but it was an all nighter.

* TALES FROM ELECTRONIC UNDERGROUND Issue #3, Vol. 1

Dale Meir

On the Pendragon adventure ideas: Interesting stuff: I've been trying to survive in a Pendragon campaign for a while now.

On Legionnaires #17: Hmm, so the Crisis on Infinite Earths didn't clear up everything and now they have Zero Hour in the DC universe. I actually vaguely remember the old Carlton Comics that DC bought which necessitated the Crisis in part. I think the Blue Beetle still exists in DC? Long time ago when I read these, the late 60s.

* SESSION NOTES #22 Doug Jorenby

On food and drink and time: Junk food, the fuel of gaming! :)

* REFUGEE # -v(l,l,O,r,s)

On the Borg: Well, we haven't seen much of the Borg since the episode in which Borg who had gained individuality were being led in a sort of cult by Data's evil twin Lore. I doubt that the whole of the Borg became individualistic, but I suspect that the writers don't find the Borg interesting.

* WHO IS JOHN GALT? #8 Curtis Taylor

I'm fairly pessimistic about RQ and Glorantha these days. I guess the continuing shifting world doesn't encourage me much. Heck, the runes used to be the building blocks of the universe in RQ2 but now they're only God Learner constructs and any attempt at universal truths get labeled as God Learnerism on the Digest. Why, everybody knows that universal truth is the area of Illumination! :)

* READING COMPANION #3 David Dunham

How is the fatality rate in Pendragon Pass? I've been noticing in a Pendragon campaign I'm in the chance of sudden death is pretty high. But I notice in your write ups that personal interaction is as important as combat. Hmm, actually it's that way in the campaign I'm in, actually.

* HUMAN NATURE: ANGEL, BEAST, OR OXYMORON? Robert Butler

I suspect that it is simply easier to play an ideal or a stereotype than it is to play a well rounded character with drives more complicated than simplistic views of good and evil.

Odd thing that comes to mind. I've noticed that a lot of folk tend to affect a certain sort of stilted speaking pattern when fantasy role-playing. I am not sure why they do this, but it seems to me that it is simply easier to speak normally unless one is pretty good at affecting a convincing accent or realistic speech pattern. I'm not sure what that has to do with anything.

THE BIG SECRET!!

What some folk may not be aware is that all I really do on this zine is type up my semi-brilliant ideas. The formatting and artwork is all done by are overworked editor Peter Maranci and all praise should go to him.

NEXT TIME

I hope to write up some more hopefully humorous products you'll never see in stores. I'm going to try to get an overview of SF TV this season, also.

The Eight Track Mind #9 is copyright 1994 by Virgil Greene. All trademarks and copyrighted stuff belongs to their rightful owners of course. Some info came from the Boston Globe, Usenet, Shadis magazine, Pyramid magazine and various other sources.



Welcome ye swabs. Ye be in for another special treat about me travels to wondrous stores in Boston about the underground Sloops (in other words, all the game stores in the Boston area accessible by the subway system).

I was traveling on the T (Boston subway system) a couple of weeks ago when a stranger noticed that I was reading *Interregnum*. He said "There's role-playing in Massachusetts?" I then realized that I have been here too long and have forgotten how hard it was to find gaming stores, never mind making gaming connections. So without further adieu it's:

The Careless Gaming Swabs' Guide to Boston

I will be using the following 5 star scale:

- x-Not even a plank mate
- *-Thar be sparse pickings here
- **-Thar be more than sparse pickings.
- ***-Tis Average
- ****-Almost grapsin' Gabrial's Fire
- *****-Thar she Blows

Compleat Strategist

201 Mass. Ave.

Boston, MA

(617)-267-2451

Open 10:30am-6:00pm (m-f)
10:00am-6:30pm (sat.)

Take the Green Line (any car but the E line) to Hynes Convention Center, Exit to Mass. Ave., cross the street and go left on Mass. Ave. for about 4 blocks and it will be on the right hand side.



The famous puking Siamese snail of Llap Goch.

Board Games-*****

Magic-***

Miniatures-*****

Roleplaying Supplies-*****

War Games-*****

A dependable store that has a nice balance, especially considering the amount of space they have to work with. People have a ritual of hanging out here for the UPS truck at 2:15pm or so when the new Magic expansions arrive. They have a hefty amount of gaming magazines to choose from. There are all sorts of board games from *Monopoly* to *Advanced Squad Leader* (and my personal favorite *Cosmic Encounter*). It's one of the more dependable stores as they seem to have the newest games first, and they hold a soft spot in my heart because they have never hiked up the prices above retail on any of the collectible

card games, even though the games sell well-heck they even give all MIT SGS (Strategic Gaming Society) members 10% off.

Eric Fuchs Hobbies, Inc.

28 Tremont St.

Boston, MA 02109

(617)-227-7935

Open 9:00am-5:30pm (m-sat.)
12:00pm-5:00pm (sun.)

Take the Green Line to Government Center As soon as you exit turn 180 degrees and walk towards Tremont St., Go left on Tremont St. for about 2 or 3 blocks on the left side of the street and you're there.

Board Games-**

Magic-***

Miniatures-***

Roleplaying Supplies-**

War Games-***

ye be on page 2 swab

A throwback to a true hobby store-hobby meaning puzzles, trains (even trains of the Green Line cars), models, woodburning, kites, etc... They can sometimes surprise you; they usually order Magic cards but if you don't look behind the counter you won't see them. You can get a kit to build your own trapeze unicycling freak which is really cute. Probably the only store that I know that sells modeling clay, Magic cards, wooden paddleboat kits, TSR and Avalon Hill games.

for roleplaying they have a huge selection and are probably one of the few places that has all the GURPS supplements. The Magic selection is on average with the other gaming stores with a box of the previous expansion behind the counter. They also sell individual cards on the weekends. I would say their main weak spot is that they seem to have a month lag getting in new games (outside of Magic, that is-they get that on the same day as everyone else).

Excalibur Hobbies

Ltd

63 Exchange St.
Malden, MA 02148
(617)-322-2959
Open 10:00am-6:00pm
(m-sat.)
10:00am-8:00pm
(Fridays only)

Take the Orange Line to Malden Center. After exiting the turnstiles walk in an almost straight line directly across Florence Street. to Exchange St., go 3 blocks and it's there on the left hand side of the street.

Board Games-****

Magic-***

Miniatures-*****

Roleplaying Supplies-****

War Games-*****



This carpet RULES!!!

A large and well-rounded gaming store. One unique quality of this store is the huge selection of back issues of roleplaying and wargaming magazines. Of all the stores I've been to they have by far the largest selection of miniatures: anything from cavemen to freak-a-zoid Warhammer type stuff. They are also very strong in the wargaming area, hell they have swords and helmets on the walls! As

The Games People Play

1105 Mass. Ave.
Boston, MA
(617)-492-0711
Open 10:00am-6:00pm
(m-sat.)
10:00am-7:00pm (fri.)

Take the Red Line to Harvard Square

As soon as you go out of the main exit turn 180 degrees and you're on Mass. Ave.

Walk 4-5 blocks and it's in a 2 story concrete business complex on the left side, next to Dolphin Sea Food (or something like that).

Board Games-*****

Magic-***

Miniatures-**

Roleplaying Supplies-****

War Games-****

They have a bit of just about every type of game here. This store actually has games for children as well as adults. An even and ample selection of all the game categories except for miniatures. One thing that they offer that most other game stores don't is a good selection of stupid party games (i.e. Pictionary; I love the one game with the mice and the plungers) as well as some very handsome chess sets. I guess

ye be on page 3 swab

the weak point in this store would be their poor selection of gaming 'zines.

Pandemonium Books & Games

8 John F. Kennedy
Cambridge, MA 02
(617)-547-3721

Open most days 11:00am-10:00pm
Sun./Wed. 11:00am-6:00pm

your backpack is that you have to check it (understandable; I prefer not to carry mine) but the check cards are some rare and usually out-of-print Magic cards cut in half (mine was a Chaos Orb -- it almost brought a tear to this old salts' eye). The main weak point in the store is a lot of people have told me they feel some of the people running the store are a bit snotty. They sell a limited amount of individual Magic cards on certain days (call before you go) as well as the usual Magic releases.



Aye. this be happenin' to me friends who bring Magic to weddings and funerals.

Take the Red Line to Harvard Square
Go left on JFK St. Enter "The Garage" and it's
on the second floor next to Condom World
(really!)

Board Games-x

Magic-***

Miniatures-x

Roleplaying Supplies-****

War Games-x

A nice selection of new and used science fiction/fantasy/horror books.

Pandemonium is also the only one I know that sells used RPG material (they sell new ones too). The main concentration is roleplaying and it's a decent selection. The first strange thing that you'll notice when you enter this store with

Your Move Games

400 Highland Ave.
Somerville, MA 02144
(617)-666-5799

Open 11:30pm-8:00pm 7 days a week

Take the Red Line to Davis Square
Use the College Ave. exit, go left on College Ave. for one block, take a left on Highland Ave., go 2 blocks (past Davis Square Collectibles) located on the right directly across the street from Disc Diggers, on the 2nd floor directly above Yee Village.

Your Move Games (continued)

Board Games-***

Magic-*****

Miniatures-***

Roleplaying Supplies-**

War Games-**

Of all the gaming stores I know I have to say that Your Move Games has the most extensive inventory of out of print and unique unopened packs and individual cards for M:tG. I made it to their opening day and managed to purchase some beautiful Italian Boosters (or *Busta* in Italian). The Italian boosters are revised cards printed with black borders and the deeper, darker colors like the original alpha/beta printings, but I digress. They also had packs of Legends™, Antiquities™, The Dark™, Fallen Empires™ and the much sought after Revised packs at list price (just the revised and currently released packs were at list) as well as individual cards from all the expansions for sale. One other big plus for this store is they give all *Boston Magic* players (MIT building 16, 7:00pm, Friday) 10% off.

The store has 2 gaming rooms in the back that are open for anyone to game in. The store is a little weak in role-playing supplies but has a decent amount of cool board games (i.e. Blood Bowl, etc...). Warhammer is also taken seriously here as they have plenty of supplements and sets to support it.

Bottom Line: If you're a serious Magic junkie this is the store for you.

The Scuttle

This area will be used to review great and crappy games, be they board, computer or role-playing (tabletop, live or otherwise). All the computer games reviewed here were run on a 386DX-40MHz, co-processor, 8 meg RAM, MS DOS 6.0, Windows 3.1, and a Pro Sonic 16 sound card (100% compatible with Adlib and Soundblaster cards) system.

All games are based on the Jolly Roger Scale:

1-A retched abomination

2-Should be cast overboard

3-'Tis Average

4-Almost Graspin' Gabrial's Fire

5-Thar she blows

With the incredible amount of the collectable card games spewing forth I'll to keep up with a smidgen' of it.

Star Trek: The Next Generation®

Jolly Roger Rating= 4
Customizable Card Game™

An interesting card game with some beautiful cards. The cards are so beautiful that it earned one skull more then it would have otherwise. It's an entertaining game that has a few major flaws in game design. The first can be solved with a little doing: it really doesn't lend itself to multi-player gaming. I think the draw of the other card games is the multi-player (I know M:tG wasn't designed this way but it seems to always be played this way except at tournaments) interaction. The second is the money race. In most games the really powerful cards (read rare cards) have a direct cost proportionate to power but this just simply isn't the case in the Star Trek game. Bringing in the most powerful person or thing costs as much as the suckiest. This problem might be solved by turning it into a 3+ player game when the uniqueness factor (you can only have one person or ship -well the powerful ones anyhow-of a certain name on the board at a time) would kick in.

I liked it; it's a good game but not a great game, fun but without the wider options (that other games offer). It just doesn't seem to be something that is going to have a lasting impact with people that play the game for fun.

ye be on page 5 swab

Trekkies will get off on it a little longer. Perhaps there are so many Star Trek fans out there that they will come up with some better rules and make the game extremely fun for a indefinite continuum of time.

On the Edge™

Jolly Roger Rating=✿✿✿✿

Although the initial run has a rather limited amount of different cards (around 270) it plays pretty smoothly with up to 5 players. The characters are so interesting that it has almost tempted me to buy the roleplaying game that it was taken from. The art is not very good but it makes up for it with ideas. Things like the *Furry Seductress*, *The Dirt on Dr. Nesbaum*, and the *Pistol-Grip Chainsaw* left me seriously chuckling.

A must for any of the demented, banana republicans, and/or punkers. Hopefully the Feb. ("next scheduled release date") expansion of 90+ cards will alleviate the problem of the variety in the game.

Weird Magic Ideas

When I was the last Magic tournament I saw a truly sick and twisted deck. Although it wasn't always successful when it worked it was truly sadistic. Once he got the right card combination out (Land Equilibrium, Nethervoid, Armageddon) all you could do was sit there while a normal Mesa Pegasus beats the carp out of you. You can't put any lands out because of an Land Equilibrium

followed by Armageddon and you can't cast any spells because of the Nethervoid (all spells cost 3 more to cast). Joe Wells has agreed to let me share his sick and twisted recipe with you so *Bon Appetite!*

The following is a quote from an unknown author and is the name of Joe's deck:

We must rid ourselves of the old Pointillist notions of bombing- of individual, discrete "bombs." Rather we must strive towards a mere generalized notion of bombness, a sort of aura. I envision it as being rather like sunrise.



How you feel when Joe's deck works

Lands

- 2-Tropical Islands
- 3-Tundras
- 2-Savannahs
- 3-City of Brass
- Library of Alexandria
- Maze of Ith

Artifacts

- Ivory Tower
- Icy Manipulator
- Fellwar Stone
- Sol Ring
- Black Lotus

1 of Every Mox type

Juggernaut

Green

- Channel
- Regrowth

3-Birds of Paradise

Black

- Nethervoid
- Mind Twist
- Demonic Tutor
- Guardian Beast

Blue

2-Mana Vortex
Land Equilibrium
Copy Artifact
Ancestral Recall
Mana Drain
Braingeyser
Recall
Timetwister
Time Walk
Serendib Efreet
Zephyr Falcon
Fireball
Wheel of Fortune

White

2-Disenchants
Swords to Plowshares
3-Armageddon
2-Balance
2-Thunder Spirit
2-Mesa Pegasus
3-Wall of Swords

Davey Jones' Locker

or Comments to Interregnum #8

David Hoberman-Wow! Talk about a written brain masturbation, I like it! I think it might have been more appropriate to have a picture of a dude holding a skull and gazing into the "deeper pool of darkness or is it light."

Gilbert Phili- How about if Mokshe "The Mercenary" was having his dead body carried back to his home village when "presto" he wakes up the next morning famished and making an annoyance of himself begging for breakfast. He's extremely hungry and can't remember anything that happened in the last couple of months. At this point I would think the PC's would be having the word "Clododge" come to mind and think nothing more of it. In "reality" an enemy from their past that they killed has actually found his way back to the material plane and has possessed their comrades' body. Little clues that will start tipping them off could be as subtle as fingernails dropping off, turning green, or having an ear drop off because he is still quite dead -ooow! "Just think of the mess when he sneezed!"

Dale Meier- Glad to have a different point of view in the 'zine. It must be hard to be a Christian and roleplay. Putting up with ignorant people like Pat Robertson would kill me as this is a direct quote from one of his shows; "Parents, if you buy D&D for your children for christmas you might well be buying your own death warrant." I like your reviews, keep them coming.

Peter Maranci- I loved the Haikus. I think you should release them on the net in the rpg section so a larger audience could enjoy them.

Rich Staats- I love the way your adventure started with a scream (nice touch) but I hate starting an adventure as a prisoner. I know it makes for good roleplaying and grand scheming, it even makes for a grand tale that I like to hear about but I hate it when it happens to me ;)

Doug Jorenby- I love stopping a game and going out to dinner and then having the time to come back and continue. I must try that Master of Magic game, thanks for the tip.

George Phillies- I have the feeling that Elaine might be going to the pass that Harrek is said to have gone to.

Curtis Taylor- Liked the picture of "Not John Galt."

Virgil S. Greene- Good reviews of *The Tick* I agree totally with you that the reason it's so funny is they don't break their "reality."

Bob Butler- I liked the *Wild West*, I really like Westerns but I have never had the privilege of playing in a western RPG. I really think every RPG should have a villain like Dr. Loveless (of Wild, Wild West fame).

Colophon

Aye. Matey was created on Ami Pro v. 3.01. Most of the graphics are provided via a cheap hand held Logitech scanner and most of the pictures are from various Dover books (also known as copyright free).

peaceable omeanord8

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"By annihilating the desires, you annihilate the mind. Every man without passions has within him no principle of action, nor motive to act." -- Claude Adrien Helvétius

This zine is a reprint of the last zine I saw published for The Wild Hunt. I realize there are people that may find this rude to Mark Swanson, but this is not my intent. I simply wanted to continue the conversation that was running with several people in the Hunt, many of which are also in Interregnum. Also, it means I've once again been able to postpone that terrifying moment when I'll have to come up with something original for Interregnum! :-) If you find reprints offensive, please feel free to ignore this zine.

"We trifle when we assign limits to our desires, since nature hath set none." -- Christian Nestell Bovee

I am a person who likes to play for a very specific reason. Simply put, I like to see how people react under stress. This is not something I can ethically test or study in real life. Thus, I game, and push my PCs (and sometimes fellow players!:-) hard. I like strong characters who are in a state of change, because they tend to have le grand passion. It is passion, and the changes it causes that help define a PC for me. It is also, for me, the situation that calls forth the most effort and skill when role-playing.

If you've seen or read "Les Misérables", you've seen characters with passion. All the people in "Les Misérables" have passion: Valjean, the thief-protagonist, is running for his life, while trying to retain his morality. Inspector Javert, the antagonist, is (within his version of morality) obsessed with tracking down our hero--the law *shall* prevail. Almost all the other characters have their passions also: Fantine, the unwed mother, is desperately trying to make ends meet, and it kills her. Marius, the idealistic student, is torn between the ties of love and friendship. Eponine, the street gamin, is desperately trying to show Marius both that she loves him, and that she is old enough to be loved in return. She also is killed by her passion.

As you can see, this passion isn't always a happy thing in literature. Sometimes it isn't happy in gaming either. This can be a real down side to playing this type of character. Also, they tend to strongly influence everything and everyone around them. This isn't a terrible thing unless it is making someone else in the game unhappy. At that point I, the player, am faced with the need to make a decision. Will I alter the character conception? Will I force the unhappy person to lump it? Will I fight the direction others wish to go so that I can follow my character's seeming destiny?

"You will become as small as your controlling desire; as great as your dominant aspiration." -- James Allen

There is a solution: play the PC everyone is uncomfortable with anyway. You probably will get to see your PC under pressure, because the unhappy person(s) has not been dealt with. You will probably be somewhat under pressure yourself. After all, you have chosen to ignore any problems other people are having with your character. The situation will probably get worse. You can be really obstreperous while hiding behind the shield of character concept (as an aside, I think I would dearly love to throttle the next person who whines "but it's in character!" at me!). However, no-one will actually complain to you personally if you are careful in *how* you obnoxiously "character-concept" your PC.

"The sleep of reason produces monsters." -- Francisco Goya

Other considerations to this type of play directly concern the GM. Say I decide to follow my character's apparent karma, and to hell with everyone else. I should not really be surprised if everyone else, in disgust, goes in a different direction than I. Nor should I make life difficult for the rest of the group, who are gaming while I am not. After all, the GM is going to have to run, in effect, two separate games--one for me, and one for everyone else. I will probably have a fair amount of non-gaming time on my hands.

"Conformity is the jailer of freedom and the enemy of growth." -- John Fitzgerald Kennedy

Say I decide to amend my character to appease the unhappy person. I may get stuck with a PC that is not really what I wanted to play, and I am now unhappy myself. The GM may be pleased--she has only one game to run. On the other hand, if I work at it, I can probably make her pay emotionally. *sigh* Lovely.

"I know but one freedom and that is the freedom of the mind." --Antoine de Saint-Exupry

There really are no absolutes in this type of scenario. Someone(s) must compromise. But I have found that my reasons for gaming are often such that *heavy* (as opposed to *thoughtful*) compromise hamstrings the very thing I enjoy most about the PC. It is not that I must always play the aloof, snotty ninja assassin. It is that the temptation to stray from the path of righteousness on the part of a PC is often both strong and fascinating to study. I've only found one real solution to this problem--solo play. Has anyone else discovered some other way to deal with this? Has anyone successfully played in a game where *everyone* is a strong player? How do you play strongly without intimidating the GM or dominating the game? Is there balm in Gilcad? :-)

"Passion is universal humanity. Without it religion, history, romance and art would be useless." -- Honor de Balzac

This may sound silly, but I just discovered something disturb- uh, surprising recently. I dropped out of the Vampire game I was in several months ago, mostly because I realized my PC was running the show. This wouldn't be so bad except that the GM played favorites, had lost control of the direction of the game, and knew it.

I don't like having favorites in a game. As I've said before in Peaceable Demeanor 002, "...it's frustrating and/or humiliating if you're the scapegoat, and too easy if you're the golden child." I was the unchallenged and unassailable golden child. Unchallenged by the other players, and unassailable by the GM's plotlines. I don't know why, but I always seemed to instantly figure out his machinations. This made him feel defensive, not a good attitude if you want to co-operatively tell a story. Once I made a casual, throw-away comment, and discovered I'd solved a mystery which was supposed to last for several sessions. *sigh*

Recently, I found out the GM was afraid to talk to me about something which happened in the current version of the game. Put precisely, the GM asked one of my roommates to tell me something had happened

to some property of my PC's. We're talking about *property*, not a character, in a *game*, which belonged to a PC that hadn't been in the game for months, and had been sent on a world tour so I, the player, could bow out gracefully.

?!?!?!?!?!

"Why should I have nightmares? I give them to you." -- attributed, on the net, to Steven King

What did I do that was so scary that the GM won't/can't talk to me about the game anymore?! My roommates aren't helping any. They just laugh, and say things like, "Well, you can be pretty intense. Collie." Fiends! :-) This *doesn't* explain it to me. I mean, it's just a game! I don't tie my self-esteem to the PCs I play, so the GM *shouldn't* think I'll break down. Is the GM intimidated by *me* (he must be!)? I don't *feel* intimidating! So I'm throwing a question out for the Hunt to gnaw on for a while. What do you do when people won't talk to you about their problems with your play style? What do you do if someone seems both intimidated by you, and *really* unwilling to talk about it? Denying it doesn't make it go away. Maybe somebody else has experienced this and can explain how to fix it to me. Sorry if the above sounds somewhat disjointed.

"We should take care not to make the intellect our god: it has, of course, powerful muscles, but no personality." -- Albert Einstein

And now, an unpaid announcement. Mark Goldberg was kind enough to write me a letter praising both my zines and my artwork. Being completely unprejudiced, I nevertheless felt some response would be appropriate.

Thanks! :-)

Okay. I'll get to the real comments now. No, I don't read A&E. It's blurry and hard to read, and I'm not a fan of Top Ten lists.

There are several games out now which seem to be based more on the self-serving, "we're badder than you" model, rather than the heroic model. Shadowrun, Cyberpunk 2020, Nightlife, Vampire: the Masquerade, and all its buddies in the Monster Mash spring quickly to mind. To me, neither type of game is inherently good or bad, but the heroic genre allows one to work with a team easier. Also, it's hard to keep a campaign based on mistrust, lies, murder, and deception running for a long time, or to "develop" such a character. I mean, what do you do, *cheer* when your fellow PC

(probably *not* friend!) can assassinate double their body-weight in crazed wolverines? What do you do when it decides *you* or some busload of schoolchildren are crazed wolverines?

I recently found out that FASA deliberately undervalues the sample characters they print in their books. This is done so when you finally decide to build a PC or ship or whatever on your own, you'll blow away the printed opposition. Handicapping new players deliberately--what a dumb idea!

Glad you enjoyed "Team From Hell"! Right on the money with Mystic Shit Armor Man--yes, it was based on Black Paladin!

Planet Ten, alas, is no more. *sniff!* I hadn't been working there for something slightly over a year, but it was still a bit of a shock to get the news. The doors closed for the last time August 23rd, 1993. Basically Bob, the owner and one of my roommates, found that he had time to do two things well. Since at the time he was doing freelance writing, his consulting job, and Planet Ten, he decided to drop the least fun thing. That was, unfortunately, Planet Ten.

However, under the urgings of several people (some of who were former subscribers at Planet Ten), I have started a small mail order business. It's called (stunningly) Collie's Comics & Things. Therefore, if you want anything in particular, you can still get it, although I am (like Planet Ten) subject to the vagaries of my comics distributor, as the patiently waiting George Phillies can attest! *(:-)* Yes, I can also get the Mayfair "Demons" books (there's three, not two now!), and the "Book of Ebon Bindings" -- it looks *cool*, and is fairly popular among the artsy gaming set. And *Of Course* I would happily order *all* Phil Foglio's XXXenophile books if you want them! Not only are they hysterical, they're a best argument for both entertaining comic pornography and sex as a Very Fun[ny] Thing! Send a check for the amount, and as soon as I have the product in hand, I'll send it to you and deposit the check.

No, the giant snail hallucination was while driving a four-horse van non-stop (with assistance--I'm not *that* insane!) from Texas to Colorado. I saw the "snail" shortly after I realized that I was driving in the middle of the night in New Mexico while running *out* of gas with my reserve gas tank, and that the *entire* damn state had only three gas stations in it-- and two of them were closed!

Tease/Pyrite (pyrite--common mineral with a pale brass-yellow color and metallic luster, common name

Fool's Gold. Possible alternate meaning: Experiment #3, subject 14, right side of corridor [3.14R]. Yes, there are several versions of her *(:-)* was a cyberpunk PC who was heavily cybered and brainchipped by a mysteriously vanished corporation to do her job. She would have made a perfect villain's tool, because no-one had taken the time to give her a personality or morality. *That*, the slow development of *morality*, in a person whose job says she shouldn't *need* it and who doesn't understand it--but wants to understand the human condition, was the role-playing prospect that fascinated me so.

Tease had some obvious hooks hung on her so that she could function in a team. In fact, she functioned superbly on teams. That was never a GM complaint. Unfortunately, my efforts to initially role play her as both emotionless and constantly at top capability apparently made several GMs nervous enough that they didn't really want to deal with her. One GM, a "storyteller," quit running a game with her in it because he felt his favorite NPC (ex-PC) was threatened by her.

There were a number of cool bits I remember from all the different campaigns. In one she partnered to a basically nice guy whose face was horribly scarred. They were known as Beauty and the Beast. No-one (except maybe Beauty, who didn't want to think about it too much!) understood why she always assumed she was Beast. In another campaign one of the other players paid me a very nice compliment. Tease had followed orders to use a certain chip at a certain time. It made her forget her past; her "creative" corporation was getting rid of dirty evidence of illegal wetware. So she met this guy (a PC), and he asked her where she was from. The chip interceded, and made her memory wander. Her intensely focussed gaze and sharp edged voice slowly wandered, and then she responded with, "My name is Tecccase," and a smile that never reached her eyes. The player said it was really eerie watching me play her, rather like playing mind-games with a bomb when you don't know when it will go off.

She was always a challenge to roleplay. I attempted to make her part of about five different campaigns, all of which rapidly folded. *sniffle* I'd *really* like to explore her some day!

I find it interesting that so many people feel the only outlet for the perennial gamer is to become a GM. I love to game, and I love to play interesting characters. I've often had people tell me that since I was such an avid player, I would be most happy once I became a GM. However, I've not found that to be the

case at all. One of my biggest problems is when I come up with a neat idea my reaction is that I want to be the player, not the GM! I have to mentally ramp myself up to GMing, and I've got to feel ready, or I have an uninspired game. As an overall average feeling, I'd have to say I don't really *enjoy* GMing. I wonder if anyone else feels that way?

Thanks again for the compliments! Maybe we'll see you in TWH sometime soon!?

Comments on TWH #182

Mark Swanson

Sniffle! My zine arrived *one day* late?! Snail mail strikes again! BTW, what does that comment on the envelope mean, "how many of you are there?" As far as I know, *none* of my personalities have had any recent memory lapses. :-)

Just out of the blue, it's interesting to see you spell Scott Ruggels' name correctly. I recently noticed several Hunt members spell it wrong, and I know that would make me crazy. I try to always cross-reference other people's name spelling with how they style themselves in their zines. Perhaps I'm unduly sensitive to this because I have both an unusual legal- and nickname.

On the other hand, I know of at least one time where a miss-spelling was fortuitous. I had ordered Indian food delivered. It was not only delivered *extremely* fast, it was delicious. We were commenting on this when I noticed who the bill was made out to: Kali.

George Phillies

I've been talking to some friends of mine who're been reading your fiction. I know you said you wanted criticism, so I've put some of their reactions down. Here goes! :-)

One common complaint was that the kids can do so *much* stuff. All of what they do is amazing. Many people in this conversation seemed to feel that a sense of wonder was a necessary part of superhero stories. Any *one* ability the kids used could use exploration in a story, and be fascinating. However, the kids have so many abilities that it's hard to keep that sense of wonder.

Also, Pickering himself doesn't seem surprised enough. Admittedly, he's riding the "weird *shit* is happening!" wave quite well, and his reaction is

probably well within the parameters of his personality. However, because he has such a dry style, his reactions don't add to the sense of wonder, and the kids, of course, are quite *blasé* about their abilities.

Maybe the story needs someone who has more of a "holy COW!" attitude. They could be Pickering's equivalent of Doctor Who's sidekick. You know, the person who provides contrast to the Doctor and an anchor for the audience: the person who asks the stupid questions so the Doctor can explain things to the audience?

Maybe the problem is that both worlds (Pickering's and the kids) are strange and wondrous -- either is interesting enough to be a background for its own story. However, because both are so strange, you don't have the anchor back to the real world of your audience. Hmm. Never thought of a background as a sidekick before!

Another complaint was the kids aren't different enough in their styles. It's hard to tell them apart, especially since there is some overlap in their abilities. The advantage to having unique abilities and a name like "Always on Fire Lass" is that you know it's a *real good* bet she's the one on fire! Their spoken styles are very similar also, which adds to possible confusion.

Comics are a *very* visual medium. However, according to one of my roomies, you're describing them intellectually, not visually. We learn what they're thinking and feeling. But there's not enough *distinctive* visuals, like we're used to in comics. Maybe a tag phrase?

Finally, one person commented that he found the shuttle scene very unsatisfying. These are supposed to be kids. But they go up to the shuttle with a very "we're here to rescue you, Dummy" attitude. Their plan, while rather complex, is handled so matter-of-factly. There is no sense that this is an amazing thing. The adults in the shuttle seem to be considered somewhat of a hindrance by the kids because they aren't pragmatic enough about the amazing rescue. Also, the adults are never asked "do you have any suggestions, since *you* are the people on the scene and might know more than us about what's going on?" In many ways, it felt like the children were treating the adults like children.

I've read some of the Modesty Blaze books. The stripped-to-the-waist technique wouldn't, IMHO, work well today for a couple of reasons. One, it's a known technique -- known techniques get opposing tactics developed. This, for example, seems to be the problem

Operation Rescue is having in the San Jose area. Picketing clinics and doctor's houses works best when they're unexpected. In Palo Alto, however, one doctor's house was guarded by both the police and the neighbors. Operation Rescue members entering the doctor's cul-de-sac found a pro-choice poster on the garage door of every house in the area, and there were two neighborhood volunteers to escort every single Operation Rescue member while they were in the area. Obviously the doctor didn't feel that intimidated by Operation Rescue folks--he/she had heavy neighborhood support. Similarly, if the guards were used to women with nothing on above the waist, they wouldn't freeze. This does lead to the interesting proposition that a further development on Modesty's technique would be to enter the room with nothing at all on -- oops, sorry, my post-adolescent prurience just got ahold of me!

Two, the technique works best on men. What happens when our heroine enters the room, finds it has a few women guards along with the customary men, and is mown down with berserk speed? Obviously, someone was jealous. :-)

Finally, I find it hard to believe that men are so completely slaves to their hormones. How about it, guys? You're supposed to be guarding a dangerous prisoner/super-secret base/weapon with which to conquer the world, and you're waaaay out in the middle of nowhere. You're possibly a little nervous about this already, and suddenly this half-naked woman, who must have gotten past the guards on duty somehow, wanders into the off-duty room. Do you really freeze, wondering if that course you took in auto mechanics in community college will enable you to repair her car, so that she'll be so grateful she'll take the rest of her clothes off? You *would*?! Can I have your phone number? I've got some beach front land for sale in Texas--no, *Florida*, yeah, *Florida*, that's the ticket! One of those! :-)

Okay, time for another heavily structured and scientifically accurate survey for TWH! :-)

Our survey respondents are several male player friends of mine. The question: see above, sans possible reaction. Our responses so far:

1) This is a joke, right? Who snaked the hooker past the guards?

2) A *Babe!* Eccxcellent!

3) Where's my gun?

4) Huh. Somebody must have just gotten finished having a lot of fun. Guess they didn't know I was here.

5) What's going on? (spoken rather plaintively)

7) Now *that's* not something you see everyday, Chauncy.

8) I don't think you belong in here. (spoken rather warily)

Response #6 was actually the player's second response. The first reaction was "Oh, a Modesty Blaze shtick. Now we're all going to get shot in the back by Willie Garvin!"

Sigh Oh, well. I guess all you guys (but two and a half!) probably get shot. :-) I must admit, I really enjoyed #'s 4 and 7!

On the other hand, some of my respondents had some very good points. For example: where are our guards on the scale of competence? Are they rent-a-cops, or are they trained elite assassins? If they're on the high end of the scale, a stranger walking through the door is in serious trouble. Poor Modesty's going to be pushing up daisies!

Also, whoever comes through that door *will* get the attention of the people in the room. The reason Modesty's ploy worked wasn't completely because she'd taken her top off. It was because Willie Garvin had worked his way around behind the guards, and the guards were in a crossfire. It's not so much that a bare-breasted woman is coming through the door, as that something both attention-grabbing, and non-threatening is there. Non-threatening seemed to be the most important part of my respondent's thought-patterns. The object in question occupies people's attention, hopefully long enough for Willie to kill them all. For all the effect it has, you could send in an injured man, or even Fluffy the Poodle!

Finally, you have to consider the reason these books were written. They were titillation for "our boys" over in Viet Nam. They aren't supposed to make sense! If Willie Garvin can work his way around them, why are Modesty and Willie taking the time to kill all the guards? What's wrong with gas grenades? Why does Modesty tend to fight in the semi-nude in a scenario where a flack jacket would make much more sense? Why doesn't Willie smear himself in catsup, clutch his chest, stagger into the guardroom, and collapse on the floor, gasping, "Help me!" to distract the guards? It's so that there's a scene in each book where Modesty takes off her clothes!

Well! That was amusing, and totally unrelated to most gaming. Sorry! Couldn't resist (much)! :-)

re the Planet Ten Tootsie *grin* I didn't draw her or model for her, but thanks for the compliment?

re Hearts and Minds: I was told the man had just been informed his entire family had been murdered by the group represented by the prisoner. My first thought, when the reasoning behind the murder was explained to me, was "Did that bring his family back?" I'm not saying he was evil, I'm saying I, a naive, inexperienced, young person, was horribly shocked at the scene. I don't know how I would have behaved under similar provocation. The point was that one gets inured to violence. The me of then didn't live in a war-torn land and would have reacted with disbelief to the news that someone had callously murdered my entire family: I would not have been emotionally capable of shooting the prisoner, and I would have reacted in horror at seeing such. What I would do now I don't know. Probably my *initial* reaction would be the same. Would *you* initially believe someone who walked up to you and told you your entire family had been murdered?

Of course, Scott Ruggels occasionally accuses me of being a bleeding heart liberal. Naturally, he's wrong. I'm a bleeding heart libertarian. :-)

Just as an interesting aside, I had a friend who was a cop in Dade Co., FL for a while. Apparently at one point there was a death caused by a cop shooting an escaping (I think) suspect. The People Against Cop Violence (yes, I'm paraphrasing) was up in arms, saying the cops were reacting as if they were in a war zone. They believed that people that liked guns were becoming cops, the cops were therefore trigger-happy, and that the guns were being used more than was necessary. "Normal" people wouldn't be so trigger-happy.

There was a film the cops used for training which showed situations both where gun use was required and where it wasn't. Watching trainees were issued guns with some kind of detector in them that counted each "shot" you made, and whether it actually hit the target. So somebody official let a representative of the PACV, a cop, and a desk-jockey in the police department watch the film all together.

The film had a variety of "encounters". There was one scene where you (the viewer/cop) were in a children's playground looking for a dangerous suspect, and there's a rustling in the bushes nearby. It turns out

the first thing to erupt out of the bushes is a suspect. The second thing is a kid.

Another scene is in a warehouse, where you can only see up and down the aisles created by boxes. It's something like being in solid library stacks. Again, you're supposed to be closing in on a dangerous suspect. You're in the middle of one of these aisles, and you can hear a steady rumbling sound growing closer and closer. Suddenly two figures whip past your line of sight at the end of the aisle. They're kids on skateboards. Seconds later, another kid is passing by, and stops to look at you for a moment before continuing on his way. You get the idea.

The results of the viewing were, shall we say, illuminating. The cop did about as well as usual. He drew his gun more than he used it. He generally hit what he aimed at, and he got "killed" once, if I remember correctly. The police desk jockey was nowhere near as confident. He quickly changed his tactics to carrying the gun unholstered a lot, even though he didn't always use it. He also "killed" a few people, got "killed" himself some, and some of his shots missed their targets.

The woman from the PACV group was another story entirely. She rapidly became very erratic in her gun usage. Often she'd not react to threat, then blast wildly after she was "dead". In the case of the playground, she apparently continuously sprayed the bushes, and in the case of the warehouse, she didn't react to the first two kids, then shot the one she could see clearly!

Needless to say, the PACV group quit complaining. :-)

You inject horses for their vaccinations, of course! It's not as easy as it sounds sometimes. My father once tried to inject my first pony, and the pony's response taught me a lot about using brute force on horses. Lucky, the pony, had to have an intramuscular injection. The rump of a horse is almost all muscle, and it's easy to reach. So my father placed the syringe between his fingers, swung his hand up, and slapped it firmly down against Lucky's rump. Lucky was a rather timid pony, and apparently he saw, out of the corner of his eye, my father's hand moving quickly as if to punish him, so he hunched his back, grunted, and tightened up the muscles on his rump. Lucky's rump ended up unscratched, and my father was left holding a syringe with a large, sharp, sturdy needle bent at a 45 degree angle! A lot of people don't realize just how strong animals are.

David Dunham

You like different colors on the paper?! Hmm. I thought most people would dislike it. However, on my first perusal of the Hunt, I see other people also liked it. Thanks, Dana E. and anyone else I missed who liked it! Maybe I'll try this again.

Glad you liked my "white stuff is the paper" quote. I sure liked it when I first heard it, although I can't claim credit for it.

Like the computer "game terms"! I think "time-slicing" gaming might work best, as long as no-one gets interrupted. Everyone would get a chance to play, and no-one gets all the GM's attention.

I'm in one game now with an "interrupt processor", and it's *maddening*. You spend 10 to 20 minutes real-time slowly convincing some nervous stoolie that your group can protect him and he should give you the incriminating evidence against the super-villains. He's just about to do so, and the "interrupt processor" player looks up from the comic book he's been reading all this time and has his PC pipe up with, "Yeah, and if you don't tell us, we'll beat the crap out of you. shithead!" Aaarrgh! :-)

Thanks for your opinion on the GM erring as far as the "once-per-year" campaign. I was miserable in that game. Somehow I had managed to turn my brain off and believe the GM's assertion that it was my own fault. It probably has a lot to do with my mistakenly believing intensity *makes* a good GM, rather than realizing that often a good GM can be intense. Neither I nor four of the five other players feel I was in the wrong, but it's still nice to hear that other people agree with me.

I admit, I'm not the person to talk to about the relative merits of tool kits and game mechanics. I like the gaming, not the tools. To me the rules are almost irrelevant. Give me cool people to talk to, and problems to solve.

I understand how you feel about first impressions concerning games systems. The first time I played Shadowrun was the run I described in Peaceable Demeanor #7. For a long time, I had no urge to play what had up until then seemed like a very cool concept. I would not urge you to try Champions. However, if you have a good GM and good players, I would suggest it. That, I think, is the most important thing -- good people.

Dana J. Erlandsen

And now the cat risks its life: what does the J. stand for? :-)

I heartily agree with your commentary on LRP and tabletop gaming. I think no-one wears costumes much because we're not used to it, and we don't want to be laughed at. I have a character who is a "tiger-woman". She wears a small black spandex bikini; that way her fur doesn't get too ruffled. She's on the cover of TWH #...oops, never mind, she's not published yet. You'll probably recognize her when you see her, though. It shows too much hair, stripes, and attitude.

Do I see myself dressing up like her? Are you *insane*?! :-)

Short of dressing like her, though, I find being able to use my body language for my PC as very enjoyable. I like both reading and using body language. Scott Ruggels and Mark Bailey do this also. Still, I certainly wouldn't have a problem with costumes or props at the table. Having a "Host a Murder" game within a game might be tough though. Who's the murderer? The "new person" played by the GM, of course: certainly not your fellow PCs.

Interestingly enough, I find solo games cause me to fall into the habit of saying, "My character does..." rather than, "I do...". I'm not sure why, although my guess is that solo play almost demands I share my PC's thoughts with the GM. Thus I end up saying, "Hmmm, she probably thinks..." and somewhere along the line it becomes a habit to refer to the PC in the third person. Also, while sitting on a couch it is much easier to say, "She's infuriated! She'll storm into the room floating three feet above the ground, scream loudly, and blast him!" rather than actually doing it. Alternatively, I know when I'm in a gaming *group* where I'm not comfortable one of the *first* symptoms I notice is that I've actively (and sometimes consciously) disassociated myself from the PC, and constantly refer to them in the third person. Diff'rent strokes, I guess.

I think "Host a Mystery" games are an excellent way to introduce new people to role-playing. I've been trying for years to successfully explain my gaming to my family. There's always been that, "Isn't that like D&D or something?" kind of feeling for them. You know, "steam tunnels" stuff. Then one day they described to me the thrill they had going to a "dinner and a murder". After they happily enthused about their roles, their costumes, their acting, and how they'd each

solved the mystery (some correctly, some incorrectly!). I asked them how they'd enjoyed their first role-playing experience. When they got over their moment of stunned silence, they became much more sympathetic to my hobby!

Bill Ricker

re "brown covers and non-sales": maybe you should let Mark Swanson show you the artwork for the cover of #200, and see if you can emboss the central figure. I think that would look cool, and I (and probably Scott) would certainly help with appropriate artwork, if you'd like.

Glad you enjoyed "Team from Hell!" It was certainly fun to write. LOL when I read your comments on supers and spandex costumes. ["Fred, I'm worried about Raging Hormones Lass. Her costume's come home without her. Again."]. Toupee tape, huh?! I'll have to check that out! :-) Have you seen the issue of the Sensational She-Hulk where she's all dressed up to go into court (she's a lawyer in her non-super time), and she realizes she's going to have to fight a bad guy. She takes all her clothes off except for her bright red lace teddy (which looked rather nice against her bright green skin :-). She defeats the bad guy, and afterwards a good friend comes up and indignantly asks her *why* she stripped in public, and *how* did she manage not to tear her teddy? She-Hulk pulls her hair aside and tells her friend to look at the label on the inside back of the teddy. It's a Comics Code sticker. As She-Hulk points out, she didn't want to rip up her good clothes, and the Comics Code won't allow her teddy to get torn!

re interesting times: You know how there are comments which cease to mean exactly what they are saying, and come to represent some other idea or situation? In the Saturday super-hero game, when there is something all the players know, but the PCs don't, and there's *nothing* we can do about it, and we're going to get hurt, and we don't like it!, we all say a "mantra" to calm us all down. "There are nooo psionics in the Eeeeeight Woooworlds. There are nooo...." :-)

Thanks for the computer definitions. Re Paganism. I agree with you about the friendlies being quieter. I have found this to be the case in almost all the groups I've interacted with.

Peter Maranci

Glad you enjoyed Europe! Lucky you!

Interesting that GMing would be the thing you like best about gaming. For me it's playing, as I'm sure my comment to Mark Goldberg showed. Hmm. Are you busy for the next year or so... *waitaminnit*, stop that, I'm in control again. :-)

My sympathies and encouragement on the writing bug. Write! Submit it to other magazines! Write for other hobbies! It's too much fun to stop!

As far as how to write up the Grey Company: get the writer's guidelines to as many gaming companies as you have stamps. Some of them aren't really interested unless you've written (and had published) something before. Some of them will want to see a writing portfolio. All of them will want you to sign some kind of waiver before they'll look at anything of yours. Be prepared to have Palladium be rude to you (humor alert!). Most of them are pretty nice, and most of them answer promptly. Odds are someone will want to keep talking with you. When you get the writer's guidelines send each of the respondents a *short* synopsis.

Things to keep in mind: do you want to keep creative control? That narrows your potential buyers drastically. Do you want to keep ownership of the idea? Ditto. Must it be in a particular system? Ditto. Must it be only for the fantasy genre? Ditto. Are you willing to shorten it? You've got a lot of stuff in there. You might have better luck if it were possible for the NPCs in the Grey Company to be more integrated into the GM's world, rather than having them all dead or imprisoned in a hero-quest. Apparently lots of people want solutions, not tools (thanks to David Dunham for that bit! :-).

Think also of what kind of supplement you're planning on writing. The number of pages available can be important. Is this a book on its own? It's going to need *lots* more information, like who exactly lives in the town, who exactly the old apprentices are, who owes and is owed debts by the Grey Company, and all the assorted stats associated with all these people. Is this a short bit in one of the fantasy magazines? This option might be a good way to start. I tend to write TWH zines on new ideas I get. It's after that first once-over of the idea that I polish the deathless pro-er, I mean the writing somewhat, and aim the article's contents at the specific magazine I'm trying to sell it to. Seems to be working so far. Just be sure the final product is *different* enough from the article that there aren't any potential legal problems.

That's all that immediately leaps to mind concerning your request. Good luck! I'll be interested in hearing how it goes. Just don't expect it to be quick. It took almost a year for my first column, from the "we want this" to actually being published.

Your Vlad player sounds like a real power-greedy-munchkin type. Didn't you say he left? That does sound like the healthiest and/or easiest response to him.

"Rhino-hiding", as I heard it, comes from the SCA. The fighting was on an honor system. If, in your opinion, the blow that had just connected with you was hard enough that a real sword would have cut through your armor and made that portion of your body unusable, then it was a good blow, and you would "take it". If people thought you were calling it too hard, you had a hide tougher than a rhino's: you were "Rhino-hiding".

Thanks for the compliment of wanting my art back -- *waitaminnit*. I get it! You just want to fluster more Corporate Flunkies! Ooooh, the *pain*! Here I thought you loved me for my etchings! :-)

re "...glamorous, exciting world of professional Champions writing..." snicker, guffaw, whooooohoooo! Even George LOL on that one!

re Guy Fawkes: yup, check out Peaceable Demeanor #6 to you. As far as I know it's still done. While we lived in Spain (about 20 years ago--ooch! Time flies!) we different nationality kids would happily help each other of other nationalities celebrate any holiday available. ("You mean we get to make a REALLY BIG BONFIRE and set off more firecrackers than we can possibly imagine?! SUUURE! Heeeeey-...howcum your country has all the neat holidays?") We all had more holidays than we knew what to do with! Of course, it helps your viewpoint on history a lot if you're taught English History by a cheerfully ethnocentric Englishwoman.

Not a lawyer, huh? Suuuure. Uh-huh. Right. We got it. :-)

Ask Mark Bailey, Marc Willner, or Scott Ruggles if Fantasy Hero has to stick strictly to the rules to be fun!

I very much agree with your player character design, BNC. Why should I add more verbiage when you've said it well already?

I know it's not really relevant to gaming, but I'd thought I'd mention that I always enjoy checking out your colophon. Keep it up!

Robert W. Butler, Jr.

I'm not trying to prove Hero Games has "style and atmosphere", I'm saying that George's off-the-cuff comments aren't the only representative of Hero Games. If anything, Hero Games is *specifically not* tied to any particular atmosphere. It's a tool kit. You make your own atmosphere.

I wasn't trying to compare you to the people I was writing about. Some of it was meant as light humor. Perhaps a :-) would have helped there. I thought I was clearly stating that you and I were the observers when I said, "I guess what I'm trying to say is don't mistake other people's need to be a big fish in a small pond for "Hero Games style and atmosphere". If you thought I was naming you as someone who needed to be the big fish, sorry. Not my intent.

Strong agreement on becoming the character. The PCs I remember fondly (or even bother remembering!) are the ones where the personality became well-fleshed-out enough that I could play the body language rather than struggling to figure out what to do next. I've been told by one of my roommates that he can tell for about up to an hour after the game which character I've just been playing. He says my body language and reactions are indicative of the appropriate PC. On the other hand, this only works if I *like* playing that PC.

sigh The descriptions of PCs and games occasionally gives me a forlorn wish that I could game with the assorted Hunt members. I wonder what a PBM TWH game would be like (aside from an *amazing* acronym)?

[The following isn't a slam; I'm succumbing to my inherent urges to organize written material -- *oooh!* succumbing to *urges*!! :-)] I wish we could come up with different phrases for your cultural/gaming models. Center pole stable and such aren't very memorable or intuitive.

As an example, one of my roommates is a consultant. They've just re-named all the computers on his floor. To him, Grumpy, Sleepy, and Doc were easy to remember. Now, however, he's never sure if he's on MBST001 or MSTV003 or... you get the idea. I did like Mark Bailey's machine's name--Tubular! With Surfer next door, I wonder if there was a Radical somewhere? :-) I don't have any immediate

suggestions, but if you like I'll put my money where my mouth is think about it.

I miss your mega-zines. When are you going to get your machine fixed! :-)

Comments on TWH 183

Mark Swanson

I like the color you chose for the cover. Not what I would have chosen, but it's nice to see different points of view. :-)

Dana J. Erlandsen

I really enjoyed your comments on PC death. LOL at the illo on pg. 5!

On the whole I agree. I've found that not worrying about the points goes a long way towards keeping the PCs from becoming outrageous. For example, while I was at a recent con I was asked to make up a character. I thought for a bit, then came up with a rough outline of personality. It would need a lot of fleshing out, but I figured that was what the game was for. Later, I was asked for a character sheet. I had no idea how the mechanics of the game worked, and had no intention of mentally killing myself to throw together a sheet. I don't game so that I can feel grouchy at having had to do something I intensely dislike (wallow in an unfamiliar game system) at short notice. Also, I knew I wasn't asking for anything outrageous, on the GM's assurance. However, there was one quirk to the PC that another player was worriedly assuring the GM would cost too many points! When the GM kindly offered to write up a sheet for me I was relieved, and accepted his offer. The worried player wanted to know how many points I was putting into what. My response was that the GM was going to write down whatever he wanted to describe my concept. After all, I wasn't going to use the sheet, I was going to play the concept! So why should I care about what was on the sheet?

The concept worked just fine in the game. However, when I self-enforced a non-written-down psychlim for my PC the worried player was really astonished. I think that blew away the worried player's mind--she expected me to try to get away with metaphoric murder. :-)

Comments on TWH 184

George Phillies

sigh Sooory, George. I'll get it right someday. *Really!* :-)

You asked about my comment about Tease -- namely that I "spooked the GM" [bear in mind these are all different GMs]: a) we came to a situation that was supposed to be a 'stumper', and I quickly sketched out how my PC would deal with it-- ruthlessly and efficiently. The GM got a slightly stunned look, said, "oh" in a shaken voice, and we never played again. b) The GM had his favorite NPC do something which made the PCs want to kill him. The GM realized we weren't impressed with his favorite NPC. My PC came up with a workable plan to kill this NPC. The GM got a slightly stunned look, said, "oh" in a shaken voice, and we never played again. c) The GM put the PC into a situation which (to him) should have caused her consternation, and maybe gotten her killed. She reacted ruthlessly and efficiently (see Peaceable Demeanor 06, cmt to David Dunham), and walked away. The GM got a slightly stunned look, said, "oh" in a shaken voice, and we never played again. d) The GM matched her up (to make her more of a team player, she had a *powerful* psych lim: needs to be employed) with an NPC that wasn't very moral. The PCs threatened the NPC she was supposed to be protecting. I pointed out to the GM, in the interests of gaming felicity, the probable results of the PCs attacking the NPC in the the NPC's home base, when Tease/Pyrite had *had* time to prepare. The GM got a slightly stunned look, said, "oh" in a shaken voice, and we never played again.

You get the idea. There were other tries, but why belabor the obvious? :-). I must admit, I'd truly love to play her sometime with a GM who realized that physical attacks weren't the button to push on her. Ah, well. :-)

Perish the thought I should have a rugrat -- I mean child!! That's George's niece. No, she hasn't started gaming yet. :-)

Bill Ricker

Liked the art, and RAEBNC.

Scott Ruggels

grin Well, since I edited it, I probably shouldn't comment, but here goes. Maahvelous! Splendiforous! Superlativous! Unprejudiced commentarius! :-)

Curtis Taylor

Loved the zine title!

You seem very organised... I'm afraid I'm not much of a RQ fan however, and I've never planned out my campaigns that much, so I can't comment very intelligently. However, in your list of gods/cults, I find myself wondering what male peasants and volcanoes have in common. I guess White Wolf deserves our thanks for that one. :-)

David Hoberman

"game soundtracks"... (grin) I once played in a Vampire game where the GM announced he'd found the "...ultimate vampire song." We all waited with bated breath while, with a flourish, he put the tape into the tapedeck. The speaker crackled somewhat. The tension mounted. Then the unmistakable sounds started. "Daaaaay-oh! Daaa-aaa-aaa-oh! Daylight come and me wan' go home!" :-)

As I've mentioned before, accents and costume props also help in establishing a mood. I know I can't do streetslang to save my soul, and a poor or unrealistic attempt (to me) breaks the mood. However, I've come up with what I hope is a reasonable alternative. I start the conversation with a few well-chosen words or lines -- swearing is usually good for shock effect. Then I simply tell the player he/she/it is being sworn at. You can be descriptive about how it's done to keep the mood, e.g., he swears at you like a dock hand, she could peel paint with her vituperative commentary, you're missing about half of what he says -- he keeps switching languages. Or you can use swearing to show something about the culture. In one game I was in, I was playing a deeply religious character. The worst insult she could think of was to hiss. "You are Godless!". The 'assaulted' NPC was rather taken aback at her vehemence, if not her words, as I remember. :-) More amusingly, if you speak more than one language yourself, and no-one else in the game does, reciting poetry in a loud and angry tone of voice works well.

Returning to props, I was in one game where the GM mailed stuff the PCs would have received by mail

to the players, with the PC's name and the player's address. Props are *fun!*

Aaargh! You're *still* doing it! *sniff* Please, can't you put articles together? Jumping from page to several pages later is *really* distracting! Okay, so I'm an MTV adoptee!

Thanks for the context -- it's occasionally confusing to try to remember *why* someone said something. Also, I emphatically *don't* endorse silencing hatemongers -- it doesn't solve the problem; it's a form of censorship; and just because I can shout louder than you doesn't make me right. I *strongly* feel that the culture itself needs to be examined. No, I'm not holding my breath. :-)

But if you're examining your beliefs, and you tell even *one* other person you think this kind of hatemongering is wrong, and can explain your reasoning, then I've succeeded. It's like getting people to accept gaming -- it's slow and steady (and, unfortunately, sometimes boring :-) that wins the race. You're not going to succeed dramatically with a big rally. Reason isn't exciting to most people, and rallies are for excitement and whipping up a crowd. You're going to succeed one or two people at a time, in small conversations, using reason.

wrt depth to cultures: couldn't agree more. Let's have some *cuhl-chah* here!

grin I'll tell the GM you liked his quote re 'mad scientists' -- it was a game-stopper while we all laughed our heads off!

Sorry about the generalization about the MTV kid. I guess what I should have said was that I wondered if his short attention span and lack of depth could be traced to any particular thing in his background. MTV just happened to be the subject people were talking about.

(curiosity strikes! :-) So how old are you? Geez, I think he *is* about your age. Oooh, guilty generalizations again! I assumed he was younger and you were older because you sounded so much more rational. It's okay, I've readjusted my mental wheels. *grin*

wrt your com to Steve Marsh, 'villifying Christianity': it is a common habit of many people who consider themselves part of an oppressed minority to villify either the oppressors or the descendants of the oppressors in order to achieve more group cohesion.

[Boy, am I going to get in trouble for this one. Oh, well, here goes. :-) Thus you have (and this is by

no means an exhaustive list), blacks saying whites are bad and/or evil, females saying males are bad and/or evil, Jews saying Nazis are bad and/or evil, liberals saying Rush Limbaugh is bad and/or evil, etc.

This is not to cast derision on the real pain the oppressed group may have suffered. However, I feel it is ultimately bad for the group in the long run to insist it must be a victim, and have a scapegoat -- it becomes merely another oppressor group. To say an oppressive group is wrong is one thing. I *don't* think the Nazis had the right idea about the Jews. But to say they are *all* unredeemably evil is both an easy leap, and marks you as having much the same mental problems as your oppressors (if it is not-us, it must be bad, no eeevil). We *hate* what is not-us. We can *kill* what is not-us. Killing what is not-us makes us stronger.). Also, if you (generalised you) characterize yourself as a victim, don't you think you're casting yourself in a role? Do you really want to *be* a victim?

Just as an example, I've met some pretty radical feminists in alifornia (no, they're not endemic here! Much! :-) They complain about controlling men's animalistic urges being necessary to keep peace, as if making a law concerning how to make a pass at a woman, or making every comment between males and females sexual harassment will make it so. I object to this line of thought for a couple of reasons: a) I don't think I know of a single case where legislating morality has worked. b) I'm *not* incompetent, I'm *not* a victim, I'm *not* a child, and I resent being categorised so. I want to be responsible for myself, not for you, and I *don't* want you to be responsible for me! d) If men are that awful and animal-like, for God's sake, use some animal-training techniques on them! I mean, come on, it's not *that* hard! Both the cat and the (male) roommates are housetrained, and it was harder to train the cat! :-)

Huh. This training stuff seems to really work. One of my roommates just read the above paragraph, then went and made some waffles for me. I gotta *think* about this! :-)

Thank you, children, for being good during the sermon. And now a reading from Ecclesiastes, regarding the futility of it all: "Then I considered wisdom and madness and folly. I saw that wisdom is more profitable than darkness: the wise person has eyes in his head, but the fool walks in the dark. Yet I realized also that one and the same fate overtakes them both. So I thought, 'I too shall suffer the fate of the fool. To what purpose have I been wise? Where is the profit? Even this', I said to myself, 'is futile. The wise

person is remembered no longer than the fool, because in the days to come both will have been forgotten. Alas, both wise and foolish are doomed to die!" (2:12-16--yes, I'm taking an Old Testament class this semester, and yes, I'm enjoying it very much! Ecclesiastes should be read aloud--it has a *mesmerising* flow, even if you don't agree with the conclusions it makes! :-)

Ah, body language. I love it. A good GM and a good player playing off each other's body language is a joy. Wish it were easier to find. :-)

wrt to cmt to George Phillips re cyberpunk--I think a lot of people feel cyberpunk, as a genre, is based on violence in a world not much different from today's. Their campaigns don't work as cyberpunk, I believe, because cyberpunk is really based on the slightly disorienting feeling of everything being the *same*, but just a *little* different, a little *off*. "Bladerunner", for me, was an excellent example of cyberpunk that worked. It wasn't the violence, the guns, and the replicants that made the movie unique, it was the different and consistent *look* and *feel* of the city and the people. It was the exoticness of the culture that made the movie, and ultimately cyberpunk as a genre, really work.

Scott Ferrier

RAEBNC, except to say that if you wandered up to *me* with a giant spider on your shoulder, I'd probably assume it was going for your throat and act accordingly! :-)

Peter Maranci

"Smell-O-Vision"? Hahaha! Vanilla Hounds! I love it! It gives the line from "Thirtysomething" a whole new meaning, "Why does female bonding always seem to involve the smell of vanilla?"

If you want to try fiction in your zines, go ahead! Write! A lot! It's catching! It's fun! It's... Wham-O!

grin So you've got wanderlust, eh? Indulge yourself--it's always worth it to travel! Hmm... are you thinking about Spain, perhaps? Need a translator? :-)

Comment I made to a GM who spent what I felt was too much time on scene-setting, and not enough on interplay: "If I want to see strange, new places, I'll go there! Not ask someone to describe them to me!"

Strong agreement of your assessment of both "Heroic Worlds" and "Bridge of Birds"! Alas, it is

unlikely "Heroic Worlds" will see a reprinting. Buy it now or forever haunt used book stores.

Cheating: George mentioned one time at a con where there was a player who consistently rolled and picked up the dice before anyone could see them. At one point when George asked the player to roll 3d6, an... unusual... number resulted. George asked the player to arrange the dice the way they had fallen to reflect the number the player said he'd come up with, and came back to that player later. He knew the player wouldn't succeed in doing as he'd asked--the number was greater than 18. The player rolled in front of everyone else after that.

Alternatively, the other roommate, Bob (the less patient, more confrontational roommate--just ask him! :-), said that he had a standing rule that if he caught anyone cheating, their character exploded. In one game, a player said he'd rolled a number that was mathematically impossible. Bob gave him a second chance by asking him again, "What did you roll?" The player insisted he'd rolled the mathematically impossible number. Bob said, "Okay, you explode. Next person!" Everyone knew what had happened. After some bluster, apparently the player left quietly.

For myself, I wouldn't let it remain in the background. Talk to other players about the problem--see if they see it the same way you do. Ask the player to change their rolling habits. If they won't, ask them to leave. I know that's not easy, but I can't imagine playing with, let alone running for, someone who tries to physically or mentally intimidate me. However, that's just me. Hope these suggestions help, or at least give you some ideas to work with!

Good luck on Wonder!

Congratulations on how you dealt with Vlad. I think you're more patient than I, but it was very nicely handled.

Glad you liked my last zine. *grin* Did I say it was TSR that commisioned that study? Uh-uh! Not me! No, sir! :-)

Don't believe what Bob Butler says about you? Hmm... does this mean the story with the water balloons, the dancing boys, and the whipped cream wasn't *true*? :-)

Yah, the last picture was me, taken by a semi-pro friend, about four years ago. *sigh* One of the few pictures of me I can stand. :-)

wrto cmnt to George Phillips: FASA. Pass it on. Keep it under your hat. :-)

wrto David Hoberman re 'control freak': finger his net address *grin* "Should I kneel?"

That's all I've got for now -- I want to actually get a zine in one of the TWHs, for a change! More comments later!

Totentanz!

--Collie Collier

[Editor's note: I received this zine via email, and ended up formatting it at the very last minute--sorry, Collie! Any mistakes are probably mine.]

[There was some confusion as to the zine title. Originally it was *Peaceable Demeanor* #8; however, Collie's file header said *Firestarter* #2. But *Firestarter* #4 appeared in the last IR. Rather than try to sort this all out and risk another delay, I simply put the one thing I was sure of as the header: that Collie was the author. I hope that clears that up. ☺ ->Pete]

Softly, Softly

from Tara and Jenny Glover, 16 Aviary Place, Leeds LS12 2NP, UK for Interregnum

It's strange, writing for a group of ~~strangers~~ people I don't know yet and it's stranger for Tara, who doesn't know too much about apas, but a lot about role-playing. So in the time-honoured tradition, I shall start with introductions.

It must have been a good six months ago when Steve was surfing on the Internet and we were looking over his shoulder. The note from Pete Maranci looked interesting, he wrote a reply dictated by the two of us, jointly and probably rather incoherently. I didn't really expect anything else to happen: I certainly didn't expect to get a genuine US mail sack arrive at my door step. And since then, I've been reading *IR* in a casual sort of way, as it's Tara who is the gamer really.

[Hi, there, it's Tara here. I think Interregnum is ace. Virgil is my favourite].

One of the reasons I was a bit reluctant about doing anything more than read the issues was that I'm not a very enthusiastic gamer *[But I am]* and -- well, one of the problems is that gaming over here is very much male-dominated. I've found groups before who say they will welcome new people, but when they are faced with Tara, they sort of cringe and say "Er, the session will go on after your bedtime, dearie" or "We've got a rigidly enforced lower limit. On the other hand, if you were a boy ..." *[That's sexist. I can't help being II. In fact, I've been interested in gaming since I was 8 and I've been to FIASCO which is the local group's annual conference with Dave Bell and I've read all the D&D books, but Mum doesn't know the first thing about gaming and she's a bit of a wet blanket ...]*. Tara's comments were justified, though somewhat prematurely ended: one has one's reputation to think of. In fact, I phoned someone called Samantha yesterday, who has just moved to Leeds and who wants to start a D&D group and we talked about how few females are involved and why. She's willing to have Tara in her group. Maybe this is something I could ask the rest of you about. Is this just a British thing that gaming has been taken over by spotty 14 year old boys who play evil warriors and 7ft high trolls and who hack, slash and rape (if the DM allows them)? *[Mum never allows me to rape hobbits, mind I prefer to rob them and leave them dangling over cliffs really]*. I'd be interested in how you lot, whom I take to be active gamers, would react to an 11 year old girl joining your group.

The last group we came across which claimed to welcome new people, until Tara went along, were a bunch of young men of the 15-18 variety and although Tara claims to know all about sex thanks to helpful, neutral lessons from school and me answering all questions, no matter how embarrassing (though I don't particularly like being asked about AIDS, leprosy and where someone's G spot is in a crowded doctor's waiting room within ten minutes ... but the other people seemed to stop reading magazines to listen), they found her to be a curtailing influence and soon they changed their venue from a central one in Bradford, to someone's home as far away as possible.

Anyway, things have been at a stalemate lately. I'm not terribly keen on giving up a day to role play, Steve, my partner is 200 miles away in Edinburgh and really busy doing chemimetrics research and writing for *Interregnum* is going to be one way of doing some practical gaming.

But I've got side tracked from the introductory hit (though I hope the diversion was interesting). I come from the SF direction and, like practically every other active British fan, and involved with Intersection, which is the World SF con being held next year in Glasgow. I'm arranging the fan programme (with Steve) and the childcare section (with Tara). *[Yeah ... I've been to loads of cons where they just put the kids in an empty room with a video player and expect them to be entertained. So I'll be doing the programme and making sure that my favourites are included, I mean, things REALLY suitable for kids. There will be a full programme, equivalent to the adult prog. and in the evenings there'll be family stuff, anime (like "Laputa", "Totoro" and "Nausicaa"), dance (I want a disco with Corona, China Black and 2 Unlimited) and story times (I want stories about pirates and spiders and dinosaurs and dragons and monsters and monopoly)]*. OK, Tara, let's not be too missionary minded. We don't know yet if there's anyone out there who wants to be converted ... Because I was stuck in the house for ages when the kids were young and Steve and I were poor, apas are my

main form of fanactivity (I also get a kick out of getting the post, one thing I've got against Christmas). Because the post is choked with Christmas cards [*Boring, unless they're addressed to ME*], I leave the house before the post arrives. On the other hand, it's great when I get back, as I can look through the results of two mail deliveries and I've got the time to read them leisurely. Even now that the kids are older, I don't often go to cons or parties or other fan events, though I love reading about them. In 1995, everything will be leading up to Intersection, though I'd like to organise a relaxacon afterwards, maybe in a leisure centre in the back of beyond, where there's no tv, but lots of hooze (fruit heer is my favourite) and where people can knacker themselves walking or sailing in the day and chat in the evening after long, hot showers. [*Remember to take plenty of spare clothes, Mum, you know what you're like with a tiller!*]. Yes, tillers and me are diametrically opposing forces. Tillers develop a mind of their own as soon as I step on a boat.

Yes, well, that's enough about me, what about you, Tara? I'll type for her, she's doing her maths homework [*Reluctantly!*]. I got involved with fandom when my kids were 3 and 1 respectively and became very active. As soon as they could appreciate fandom, they became moderately active too. This is the first apa Tara has taken part in, though she is very keen on reading other ones I have. Both Tara and Rob (that's the other kid) [*A squirt, but I love him (sometimes)*] have their own fanzine called *Cybrer Bunny*, which I think is pretty good, apart from the proof-reading (that's left for me to do, as well as a few other menial tasks, like typing articles in and doing the photocopying). They're working on the new issue of *Cybrer Bunny* right now, which has a piece on urban coyotes in Canada (Tara is very keen on wolves) [*MUM! Don't tell them about Magda!*] (her imaginary wolf friend) and I'm hoping to reprint a really good short story about an imp which appears to a fantasy author (a thinly disguised Piers Anthony). But I can't do that until I've got permission from the author. I hope it will be ready to go out with the Christmas thank you letters. [*Mum, I've got these acute angles done, NOW can I read about Cthulhu?*]. Tara is an avid reader, always has been. Roh is a little more difficult to persuade that reading can be fun in itself, rather than a tool to get information, but we've just finished reading *The Graphic Hobbit* and are embarking on the mammoth quest of reading *The Lord of the Rings* (for the second time). That's my bedtime reading taken up for the next six months or so.

Now that Tara is safely occupied with literary horror and Roh is buried in elementary Tolkien, maybe I can take a look at some of the pieces in issue 7. I'm gradually getting used to the different voices. I'll start with you, Pete. Tara and I may have a go at working through "The Ice Ruins" (it will fit in with one of her hobbies, which is alpine plants). Ha! Another female, Elizabeth McCoy (which highlights one of the unusual things about *Interregnun*, that is that you don't print a roster of members and also that far more copies go out as speculative copies than go to regular members and/or subscribers).

Passing hastily onto George Phillie, I'd have preferred a LOT less action and a LOT more characterisation. Elaine struck me as being quite an interesting character, a little opinionated and arrogant perhaps, but when you're a talented wizard/swordsman, perhaps you can be allowed a few eccentricities. I sometimes wonder -- no offence, George, this is just a general point -- just how much research goes into stories like this. This arrow business, for example. I came across a rather interesting article in connection with my work with medical audit (very peripherally) about arrows recently, which mentioned that Mexicans riding against Indians would bind blankets very tightly around their abdomens, not because of cold, but to deter arrows. If an arrow "transfixed" them, they were more likely to die of peritonitis than a broken heart. Also, of course, as some arrows were deliberately barbed, attempts to pull them out would only cause more damage. They would have to be pushed through, in the hope that there was a convenient exit point.

Yeah, Douglas, the sheer length of gaming is one of the things which puts me off (as mentioned above). I'm not willing to sacrifice a day [*I am*], as I'm just so busy with other mundane tasks: the house, food, my own SF fan activity, keeping in touch with relatives, the Net, work). But I'm not so sure about board games. They lack the sheer magic, bonding and sense of wonder that a role-playing system can offer [*Can we go to the Leeds Board game group, Mum? And have chips afterwards?*]. OK. I'll investigate that group again. And I'll have some chips too. I'll report back what happens.

I'm going to wind this up now. I want to keep it down to 2 pages, because of the cost, because it's an introductory piece anyway and because I need to do some real work. I've already taken the print size down twice, already (thank goodness for word processors). Just a quick spell check, enjoy the festive season and see you in 1995. [*We celebrate Sir Isaac Newton's day, but we still get Christmas presents. See you.*]

Jenny and ANTARA jenny_glover@hicom.lut.ac.uk

Strange Sands

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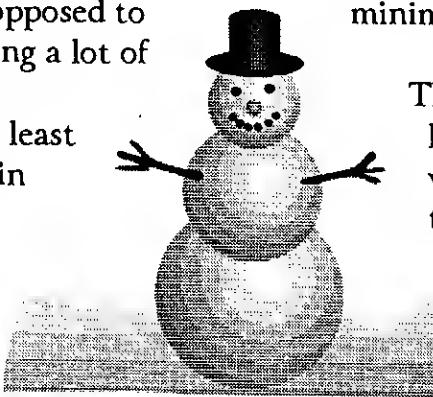
Christmastime in Massachusetts

Well, it's been a busy month, and this issue of Strange Sands has been difficult to write. This will be my first Christmas in Boston (as opposed to California), so I'm spending a lot of time adjusting. I will be missing the family, but at least there will be friends here in the east. Hope everyone out there has a wonderful holiday season!

Call Me Dyslexic

The cold weather must be affecting my mind as well, because I somehow got the topics switched around last month. I guess I'll continue the trend of reversal

and take a stab at haiku. Since the last time I wrote haiku, or any sort of poetry for that matter, was in college days, I'll dodge writing bad verse (at least for the moment) and talk about minimalism.



That is, saying a lot with a little. Poetry paints a more vivid picture in few words than most people can write in several pages. Looking back to those old TSR modules, I can remember those flowery boxed descriptions used to describe each new room in the dungeon crawl. This was perhaps one of the first attempts to get referees to "roleplay," or at least set something of a mood. The success of the description

often hinged on the writing abilities of the module designer, and more so on the reading capabilities of the referee. How exciting can anything be if “you enter a 10’x10’ room filled with water” is read in a monotone voice? Moreover, would you want to know the referee is *reading* at all? Reading is fine for a bedtime story, but the roleplaying experience involves a much more direct form of interaction, more like a group of improvisational actors than a speaker to audience scenario.

So what does a referee do when he sets up his own encounters, or uses an adventure, like Chaosium’s , that contains only essential information and expects the GM to wing it?

A scene can probably be described in a thousand different ways, but think about just two: the objective description and the subjective description. The objective description lays out there bare facts: the size of the room, the color of the sky, the state of the road. It makes no judgments, and remains essentially neutral. The subjective description has soul. It interprets the scene and makes emotional reference. “The room smells of evil,” or “the sky seems possessed.” These short descriptions suggest much more than they say, and also establish a clear tone to the setting. The subjective description can make a group of players relax or tense up, all depending on the choice of emotionally charged words. In

Interregnum #8

The Log That Flea

Hah, heh. Loved your haiku, Pate. And a good use of fonts, too. I especially liked tha “tapping” references. I now have a pratty good idea how you might raviaw tha stuff on the shelves ;) ♣ Glad to sea that SJG end WW are finally acting like grown-ups (although it was awfully fun watching the venom fly). Thanks for the updates. ♣ Hmm, I see your point regarding finding players. I realize that gaming with the same people can become etala after ewhile, end it’s necessary to chenge to keep things frash. I guass I was speaking of getting together beforahand to discuss what wa like in an RPG and what wa find intolerabla. You’re right though. It might not really be necessary to be graat friends; you just need to have fun.

RuneQuest Con Module

Thanks for an interesting set of characters and situation. Were thara rafaree notes explaining what is bahind Tarkin’s disappaarance? I liked tha way you worked in tha PC’s motivations —a very different group of paopia.

general, a longer “warm” description will put the party at ease, and short, terse descriptions will set them on edge. Referees can use these to surprise players, too, and create a real roller-

The Skeleton Key

Enjoyed reading your thoughts, and I agree to some extent, that gaming is not a tangible that can be easily observed and critiqued. I tend to believe, however, that gaming can be perceived as art, as long as people agree it can only be observed by a limited audience. One player can observe the art in another's player's "performance" and express an appreciation, and all players can work together to produce something greater than they came with individually. It can't be hung in a museum, but I believe that, as you say, "art...should strike something in the viewer, reader, whatever, that stays with him or her, forging new connections," and I equally believe that each player can walk away from a game in such a frame of mind. The unique thing about RPG is that players are both the audience and the participants.

Tales from the Electric Underground

Glad to see you've discovered *Pendragon*! I play with friends (Aye Matey author, Scott Ferrier and *The Eight Track Mind*'s Virgil Greene) on an irregular basis, and have found the games are deceptively simple. And yet we've seen more development in our characters over the last couple months than it takes in years of gametime in other systems. My character, Cedric, has married twice, and has two boys named Gregory and Patrick. He's survived a number of nasty battles. Was delighted to see your takes on Peta's hooks. I especially liked the Bad Monk. :) ♣ Glad to see your continued reviews. I like to read what's going on in the comic world; I haven't been up to date really since Frank Miller wrote the *Dark Knight* series. ♣ Don't limit yourself to experienced players! Some of the best roleplayers are the ones who have never even tried playing. Even the hack and slash can be cured. :)

coaster ride for the hardiest adventurers. This isn't to say that objective descriptions don't have a purpose, too. When describing a particularly gruesome or tense scene, it's sometimes best to remain clinically distant, and let the

player's minds do the dirty work. Insane NPCs are quite effective when played "straight."

Poetry gives us wonderful examples of using words carefully to evoke a mood. Take a look at "Ozymandius" or Poe's "To One in Paradise." See the scene being described, and look for the words and symbology that carry it. Don't be afraid to use metaphors and similes: "It's almost as if some giant hand reached down and ripped a great hole in the ground." The more succinctly you imagine the scene and describe the image, the easier time players will have suspending their disbelief, and get on with enjoying the game.

Harn: Out of the Box

Things are off to a good start in the Harn campaign. A few notes on our starting session:

The characters are from a small village called Meminast, which is located in the southern portion of the Kingdom of Kaldor. While Kaldor primarily a feudal, "chivalric" kingdom, it still feels the shadow of its darker past, when it was overrun by Lothrim the Foul-spawner and his wretched minions. Meminast lies near the Cherlmarch border, a region known for the ruthless

Pagaelin, a "vicious tribal people."

The characters are Alaina, a widow who has taken over the responsibilities of running her ex-husband's manor (and all the local prejudices along with it), Brutus, one of the local yeoman, and, as the eldest, the party's voice of wisdom. Durgin, a runaway who tutored by one of the Shek-Pvar, Harn's society of arcane practitioners and Quindlen, a farm kid stuck at home and, as a result, resents just about everyone.

Durgin's teacher completed his instruction by informing his pupil that he must return home. "You are needed there" was his cryptic but typical explanation.¹ Durgin, having lived under the brutal hand of his father, was not eager to return to the nest, but also realized that becoming a Mavari, or master, would involve doing many things that were not particularly desirable.

The reunion was much as he expected: violent. A near fight was broken up by locals, but even they could not prevent an inquiry by the local constabulary. Although the manor lord had died some

months previous, Brutus and several other men-at-arms recognized Durgin as an escapee. Durgin's abduction was cut short, however, by the appearance of a stranger on the road from Chewinton, a village to the south. A villager from Chewinton was perhaps not that unusual, but the fact was that the man was covered in oozing black sores. Whispers of plague spread quickly through Meminast, but Millik, the local Peonian priest would not refuse the man entry to the local chapel.²

The villager was evidently infected with a disease never seen before, and which by the looks of several strange scratch marks, could possibly be of supernatural origin. The priest's suspicions were confirmed when the man started babbling nonsense about "hunting shadows" and "creatures of the night." Millik reported his findings to Lady Alaina, and it was decided that a group should ride south to check for further trouble.

In addition to Lady Alaina and Brutus, both Durgin and Quindlen volunteered to travel south, since few were willing to chance contracting plague; Durgin to follow his path and Quindlen to gain his

1

As a member of the Savoryan convocation, Durgin has learned to trust mystic knowledge, and has indeed learned a number of incantations that provide limited access to the future.

2

The goddess of healing is sometimes obstinate in matters of life and death, no matter the consequences.

freedom. Much notice was taken of the sword Quindlen produced, and Brutus made note to question the boy about where he got it. Quindlen managed a lame story about a knight giving it to him, but no one believed it. The matter of plague outweighed the seriousness of the offense, however, and the group rode south.

As they drew closer to Chewinton, the group noticed the trees had taken on a sickly color; it was noted that the blight seemed to be of similar nature to the sores of the villager. The vague scent of decay wafted north as they caught sight of the village, along with the more pungent smell of burning flesh and wood. A cottage burned unchecked on the side of the road, and no one was in sight. The group worked to make certain the fire would not spread, but could do little to extinguish it. Further up the road stood the manor house. The main gate was shut and locked, and Quindlen had to climb the palisade and jump down into the courtyard to open the gate. There were signs of struggle, but no life. They prepared to enter the building.

Movie Mania

The Thanksgiving movies were flying fast and furious this year, and we finally made it out to see the major ones.

Frankenstein

An enjoyable movie for the most part. Kenneth Branagh likes to emote a bit much, but Robert DeNiro played a great monster. This was a very literary take on the original, but I enjoyed this one much more than last year's rock video version of Dracula. The scariest scene is actually the one without the monster—the swift and foolish judgment of an innocent woman by mob rule.

Generations

Of all the recent Star Trek movies, this one has the greatest entertainment value for the buck. That's not to say it's a great movie by any stretch of the imagination, just that it's a lot of fun. Brent Spiner steals the show, along with extra extra special effects. Patrick Stewart does a fine job depicting a man who has lost hope for a family, and Malcolm McDowell is a refreshingly witty villain. Give it a spot above I, III, V and VI, but not as good as II or IV.

Interview with the Vampire

This one got to me more than I thought it would. There are some truly horrifying scenes in this movie, a credit to the makers, but not making me feel much better about watching it. I had an urge to go take a shower afterwards. All

of the acting is top notch and the setting is beautiful, but the film as a whole seemed empty somehow, much like its much-vaunted vampire stars. And if blood gets to you, well... Not for the faint of heart, or for those looking for an uplifting message.



Interregnum #8 (cont.)

Session Notes

Glad to hear your experiences at Thanksgiving this year. Miriam and I hosted our first turkey dinner this year, and all went surprisingly well. To all who came: it was great having you over! Speaking of food, our last *Pendragon* game before Christmas had us eat guests to a great feast. The main course was wild boar, but we simulated the meal with Sam Adams beer, Chinese food and a good sized cheesecake. Thanks, Mark! :)

Refugee

The novel is developing nicely. I really enjoyed Chapter 4 quite a bit. Sean is an interesting new character, and you managed to give a few more details about the world without too much exposition: the Automata, the Gowists, the pass; very intriguing. I look forward to reading more about Pyrrin as well.

Who is John Galt?

Your SoloQuest module was great fun. I actually tried it a few times to see what would happen if I made a different decision. All in all, it works quite nicely—the character background was interesting and informative. Looks as if this will be an ongoing campaign, so I look forward to more. Great job; you put a lot of work into this.

The Eight Track Mind

I had forgotten that live games sometimes ask that players use a poem to cast a spell. I used "Three Blind Mice" for my "magic-missle" like spell the one time I played. It was primarily used to make sure the spell took an appropriate amount of time to cast. ♠ Twerps

could be fun, but I think one problem with comedy games is that, ironically, no one takes them seriously. It takes the referee some time to sit down and learn the system, and then he has to convince a group of players (with varying senses of humor) that it will be fun. Still, I'd like to see a successful attempt someday. Why don't you give it a try? I'll volunteer... ♠ Ah, *Thieves World*. Gone are the days when you could do a one-shot RPG project with such class. Sadly, the industry seems to be moving away from variety and more towards monolithic campaign worlds, a la *Dark Sun*, etc. ♠ I loved "Murphy's Rules" in Space Gamer. Glad to see it's still alive in Pyramid. "Joa Genaro" sound hilarious, too, as does "Knights of the Dinner Table." Can I see a copy next time you're over...? :)

Reading Companion

I'm enjoying the attention to detail in your East Relios campaign. Sounds like you've got a pretty smart group of players; I liked the way they retrieved the necklace. Were the "seasonal colds" anything more than that? I found myself extremely curious about that one point for some reason... ♠ Ra: *Pendragon* traits. I've found the personality traits get used with same amount of enthusiasm as the old "strength bonus" in AD&D. :)

Human Nature

Great thoughts on "good" and "evil." I always love it when an opportunity arises for have PCs choose between a reprehensible path and a merely unlawful one. :) Nothing like a moral dilemma to get black and white thinkers to question their actions. Anyone who thinks such positions are precisely defined should go watch the movie *Unforgiven*. Or read this article. Great job! :)

